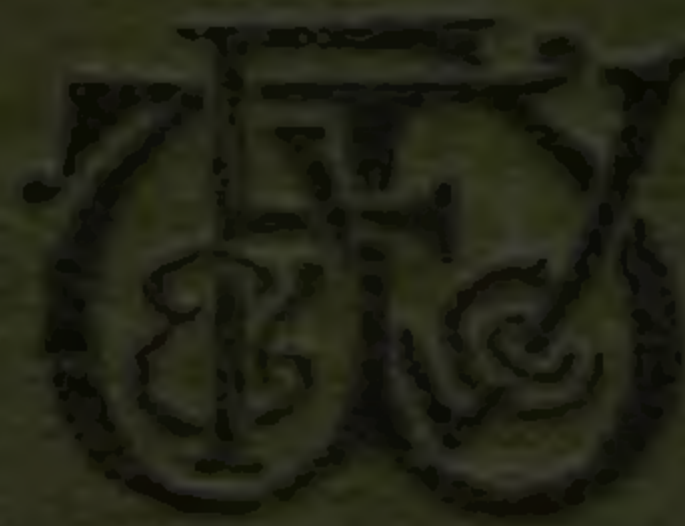


The
LUDGATE



Stories from The Ludgate, Vol. 3

The Tragedy of the Wedding by Stanley Percival – October 1898

Three Lives by Major Hamylton Fairleigh – February 1899

The Dragon of St Paul's by Reginald Bacchus and Ranger Gull – April 1899

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The Conversion of Smith by H. F. Campbell – March 1900

The Phantom Jockey by Major Hamylton Fairleigh – May 1900

A Persian Shepherd by W. B. Wallace, B.A. - July 1900

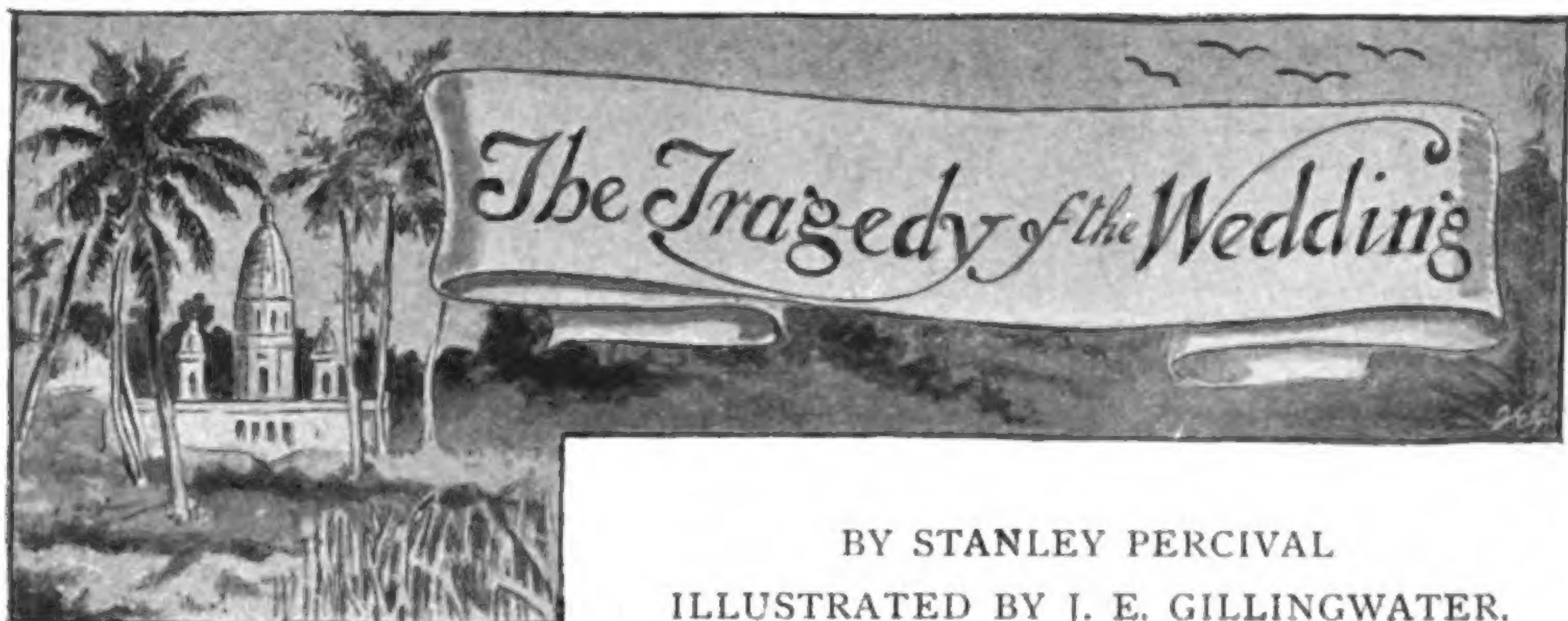
Grantlebury Grange. A True Story of the Supernatural by Russell Phillips –
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The Carlyle of Art. An Appreciation of S. H. Sime by Walter C. Purcell –
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Buried Alive. A Sketch by S. Baring-Gould – August 1900

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A “P.R.S.” in Paradise by Charles Hyatt-Woolf – October 1900



BY STANLEY PERCIVAL

ILLUSTRATED BY J. E. GILLINGWATER.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.—The main incidents narrated in this story are based on scientific investigations, and apparent improbabilities do but portend what might be accomplished by an intellectual and unscrupulous man, who sought to commit crimes with the aid of Hypnotism.

I.
NAY, Sahib, thy medicine availeth naught; my time is at hand. Even now can I hear the voices calling to me. Ever hast thou been to me as a father and mother. Thou hast shown naught but kindness to me, thy unworthy servant. Sahib! I am not poor as thou thinkest. Nay, smile not! Ere I go, I would leave in thy hands the key of the hidden treasure of the Temple of Sūrya."

The bony, withered hand of the old Indian woman, wandered over her loose garment and nervously clutched a small piece of parchment, concealed within its folds.

"I have neither kith nor kin, and the secret would have died with me, but now will I show my gratitude for thy great goodness. Quick, Sahib, quick! open it, that I may read. This treasure is for you alone, Sahib Makyne. Trust not thy friend, the Sahib Belmont, for he has the eye of evil. And if thou dost trust him, surely then will harm befall thee."

Her eyes wandered over the yellow document which Makyne had unfolded, and she translated in a low, broken voice:—

"In the Temple of Sūrya, in the

plain of Seebpore, when the Queen of Night trailed her sable robes across the face of Varuna, the treasure of the Sonārs was offered. Within the sweep of the arm is it hidden, guarded by the Sign of the Star.'

"Sahib—I am going—trust him not. I have spoken true talk—it is dark."

The eyelids closed, and her breath came in quick, short gasps, and, ere the next few minutes had passed, the old native woman, Nana, had crossed the "threshold of the world."

"Sorry she's gone," murmured Makyne; "I knew she couldn't last very long, when I saw her. Rather curious, this yarn of hers." And he looked at the parchment with its faded characters. "I can't read it. I'll show it to Belmont, he's rather keen on this sort of thing. Wonder if there's anything in it."

"This is curious," said Belmont, a couple of hours later, as he sat examining the document. "It's very old, in fact, I can hardly make it out. Now let's see," and he commenced reading word by word, translating into English as he proceeded.

"In the Temple of Sūrya—that's the Hindu Sun God, one of the Navagrahāh, their planet gods—in the plain of Seeb-

pore'—that's probably outside the town of Seebpore, which lies about fifteen miles N.N.W. from here.

"The next phrase is evidently their way of meaning the moon, and 'the sable robes across Varuna's face' might be the shadows passing over an idol."

"Who the deuce was Varuna?" interrupted Makyne.

"That's the God of the Ocean, and probably there's an idol of the old chap in this temple."

"You seem to know all about it. But go on."

"Well, what I make out of the rest of it, is, that some treasure was hidden by the Sonārs—they were goldsmiths, you know—but what the 'sweep of the arm' or the 'Sign of the Star' may be, we can't possibly guess until we see the place; but I should think it indicates the actual spot where the treasure was hidden. Anyhow we'll follow it up. I shouldn't be at all surprised if it's genuine. These old Hindus believed in offerings to their gods, and this one may have taken the form of jewels and gold, or something of that sort. I certainly propose that we go in search. What do you say?"

"Oh," laughed Makyne, "I'm game for a few days in the country, but as for making any wonderful discovery, I don't place much reliance on *that*."

"Right. Then we'll go. By the bye, its yours of course, I've nothing to do with it; but I'm a bit hard up, as you know, and if you *do* strike it rich, you might lend me a bit to go on with."

"If we do find anything, we'll go halves, of course," said Makyne promptly.

"Halves!" repeated Belmont, "that's awfully good of you, old man, but we'll find it first, and—and—then we can settle the division."

A hard look passed over his face, as a sudden thought came to his mind, and he strolled on to the verandah, and, settling himself in a lounge chair, lit his pipe.

"No, it's not enough," he said to himself, "not enough. I must have money, aye, and plenty of it, too. It there's anything in this old hag's tale, it'll take more than a simple fool like Makyne to keep me from getting it. Since the wife died, I've been going the

pace pretty smart, and it'll be eternal smash if I don't ease up a bit. But there, she's dead now, and I've only my boy Arthur to think about, and by God, for his sake, I'd go to any ends—yes, any ends. How I hate that Makyne, he's always lucky. If I get hold of this money—and if it's there, I'm going to have it—I shall go over to the old country, and look after the youngster. I must get it, even if ——" but the remainder of the sentence was left unfinished. He sat motionless. His hands were tightly clenched and the hard lines on his face assumed an expression of fierce determination.

On the morning of the expedition, Belmont was moody and preoccupied, replying only in monosyllables to Makyne's remarks.

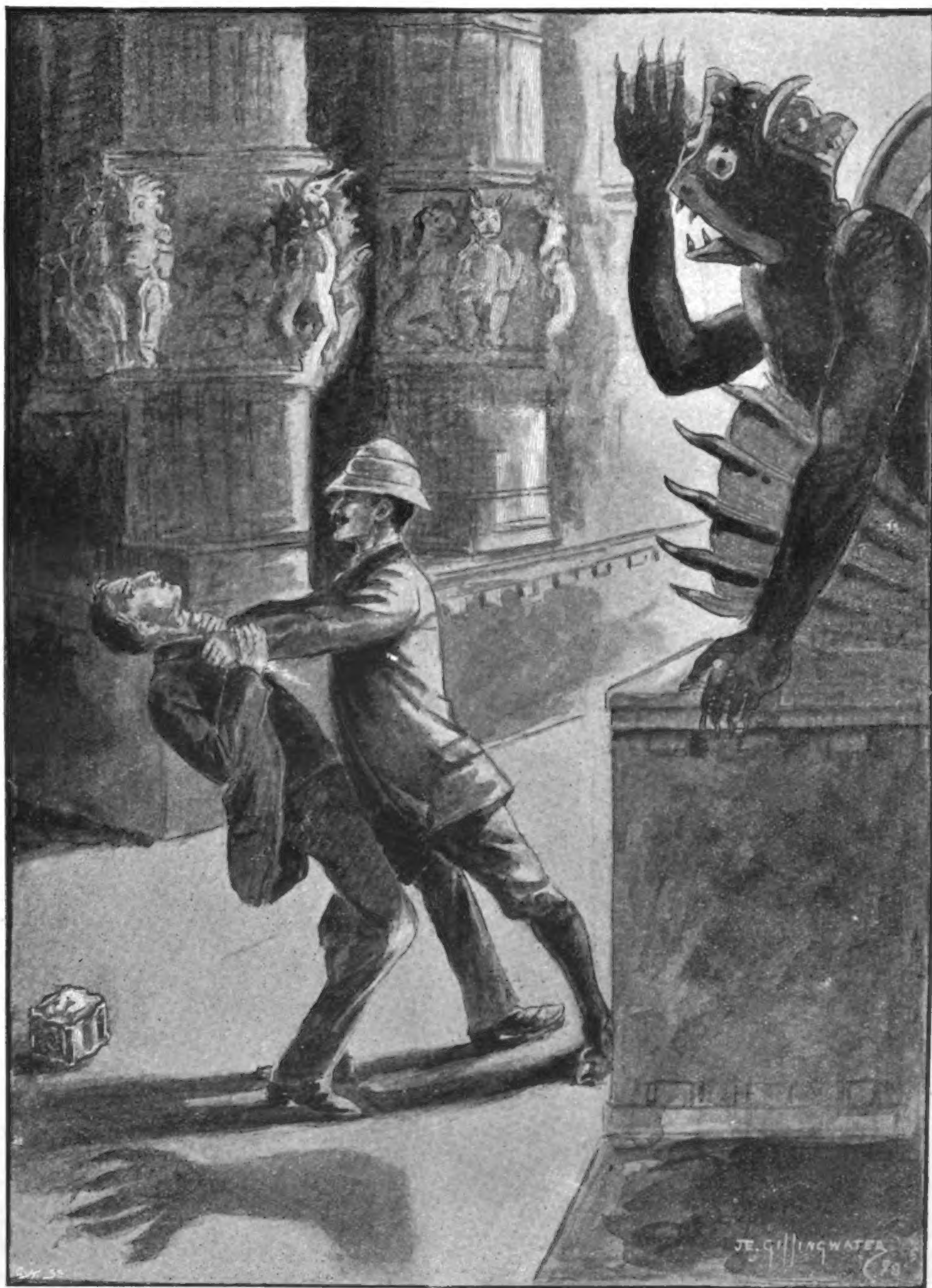
Towards evening they arrived at the ruined temple, and, too tired to commence exploring at once, threw themselves on the grass, and enjoyed a quite pipe.

They smoked for some time in silence. Miles away from the haunts of man, with the stillness of an Indian night coming on, the weird fantasies which wove themselves around the old ruin, seemed to Makyne to ring out, as a ghostly warning, Nana's last words, "Trust him not! Trust him not!" The words rang through his mind again and again, with such persistent reiteration, that at length it appeared to him as if Nana's spirit were hovering overhead in the rapidly approaching darkness. He tried to put the fancy away, but still it clung to him. At last he roused himself with an effort, and walked to the entrance of the temple. As he did so, the first faint streaks of the moon's pale light became visible, and Belmont exclaimed,

"At last she's come! We shall have enough light to work by directly."

The two men entered the temple, and Belmont, with his intimate knowledge of idols, soon discovered the one he sought.

"Here we are, here's Varuna, this with an arm raised, and by all that's holy we've struck it! I tell you, we've struck it! Here—look here," and he dragged his companion to the front of the idol. "Here's the shadow of the arm, and as



"WITH A SAVAGE CRY, BELMONT SPRANG AT HIS COMPANION"

the moon climbs higher and westward, it will move across the floor. 'The sweep of the arm,' see? It ought to fall in this direction, look out for anything like a star, within ten feet or so. Somewhere about here."

He was excited and flung himself on his hands and knees, minutely examining the rough floor, partly overgrown with grass and weeds, Makyne assisting, but still not thinking much of their prospect of securing anything of any value. After a long search they discovered a small slab in the shape of a star, let into the pavement.

"Got it!" shouted Belmont.

"Perhaps," returned Makyne; "wait until we see what's underneath, before we shout."

They removed the stone, and found a ring of iron, let into another and larger slab. They set to work with a will, Makyne's interest now thoroughly aroused, and after digging away the earth and stones, they managed to lift it away. Underneath was a rude cell, containing a curiously carved box or casket, with hinges and lock of pure gold.

"Well, I'm damned!" said Makyne.

"So am I," returned Belmont laconically.

They forced open the lid, and there, carefully wrapped in pieces of the finest silk, were jewels and precious stones of priceless value.

"Good luck!" said Makyne; "half of that little lot for each of us will make us rich men." He turned to place the casket on a marble ledge at his side, preparatory to replacing the slab.

With a savage cry, Belmont sprang at his companion, and gripped him by the throat.

"You'll give me half, will you?" he hissed. "But I'll have the lot."

Makyne struggled to free himself, but the grasp on his throat tightened, his eyes started from his head, his face became livid, until at last, with a frantic effort, he wrenched himself free.

He was too exhausted to offer further resistance, and Belmont, with an oath, drew a knife, and plunged it in Makyne's breast, who fell forward, gasping, "Nana was right, she warned me—Ah-h!" And he too, "crossed the threshold."

II.

Dr. Camro Makyne sat in his study at his house in Harley Street. In front of him was spread a collection of old newspaper cuttings, memoranda, and letters.

He turned them over, reading a line here and there, and, pausing over a slip from an Indian paper dated June 17th, 1864, he re-read the faded type:

"The body of Mr. John Makyne was found yesterday by some natives, lying in the ruined temple of Sūrya, on the plain of Seebpore. The unfortunate man had a severe knife wound in the left breast. No motive can be assigned for the crime, Mr. Makyne's personal property appearing to have been untouched. A small carved box was found close to the body, but whether it belonged to the victim, or was left by his murderer, it is not possible to determine. It has been suggested that Mr. Makyne had been decoyed by some means to the place by a native who stabbed him for the sake of what money and jewellery the deceased was carrying at the time, but who, alarmed immediately after striking the fatal blow, fled without securing his booty."

"Possibly," murmured the Doctor, "but they don't mention the fact that his friend, Belmont, went with him to the temple, and what they went there for. The poor old dad entered that in his diary the night before they started, and lucky it was he did so, and that his papers were sent home undisturbed, otherwise I might never have had a clue to work upon."

"I've been upon Belmont's track ever since I unearthed that entry. Strange that it escaped the notice of the authorities at the time. But now I think I've brought affairs to a climax. For the sake of clearness let me tabulate the data I have secured up to the present."

He jotted down a brief *résumé* of the various papers that lay before him.

"June 16th, 1864. J. M. murdered by party unknown, in Temple of Sūrya at Seebpore. Personal property untouched."

"Entry in J. M.'s diary, June 14th, to the effect that he and friend, Fred. Belmont, had become possessed of secret information regarding jewels hidden in a

temple, and that they proposed to take a week's leave, with the intention of searching, and, if found, sharing treasure equally.'

"Then comes a gap of nearly four years, till I finished with the hospital work, and had time to look round me. Then we go on:—

"'Traced out movements of F. B. at time of murder. Found through agents that he had left district some time during the autumn of '64. Nothing known of his movements.'

"Let's see, next comes this cutting from a local paper in the North of England, Aug. 3rd, '84:—

"'It is with great regret' . . . H'm, we'll skip all the conventional editorial lies . . . 'death of Mr. Frederic R. Belmont, late of India, who passed away after a lingering illness . . . His son, Mr. Arthur Belmont, inherits the whole of his father's fortune.'

"'A. B. leaves England shortly after father's death, for tour through the U.S.'

"And I should have had him at New York, if my agents hadn't made fools of themselves, and let him slip through their fingers.

"That brings me up to the present moment," and he took up and glanced over a note he had that morning received from one of his confidential agents:—

"Mr. Arthur Belmont, living at 'The Chase,' Kneston, near Leicester. Father been in India, been dead some years. Son has good position in county. Has money. Am returning by first train to-morrow, and will give further details."

"Good man, Collins,"

said the Doctor. "He has the makings of an excellent detective in him. He ought to be here by now if he came by that train. I'll give him half-an-hour longer."

He lit a cigar, and sat musing over the papers, until the page announced that Mr. Collins wished to see him.

"Show him in. Well, Collins," the Doctor went on, as a neat, dapper little man entered the room. "I have your letter; what else have you to report, and how did you gather your information?"

"Went down as a stable-help, out of a job, Sir, and hung about the stables of



"'I HAVE YOUR LETTER, WHAT ELSE HAVE YOU TO REPORT?'"

'The Chase,' doing odd jobs, and chatting to the men. Groom told me as how his master was coming up to town at the end of the month, but he didn't know where he was going to stay. So I loafed about for a few days, and came across Mr. Belmont's personal servant doing the grand one night, at a free and easy in the village pub. He wasn't above being treated by me though, but he was very close about his master's affairs at first, until I got him on a bit, and then he told me all I wanted to know.

"He said Mr. Belmont was coming up to town to be married to the Hon. Miss Shafton. Was going to stay at the Seeton Hotel until the wedding. Found out the names of several people Mr. Belmont knows in London—one of them's Major Dennis in Jermyn Street, where I've often been to take messages for you, Sir."

"Ah, yes, I remember," replied the Doctor. "Go on."

"I saw Mr. Belmont himself once, Sir," continued Collins. "He came into the stables one day when I was helping. He's a thin, fair-haired man of about forty, I should say. Light moustache, and looks delicate. That's all I could find out, Sir. I stayed there a week, and got back to town this morning."

"All right, Collins, you seem to have got all the particulars you could, but it's a matter of no consequence. I don't think it's the man I want, after all. That's all just now; I'll let you know when I want you again."

"Now," he said to himself, after the man had quitted the room. "It's just possible that this Arthur Belmont is the son of the man who murdered my father. It's probable he doesn't know anything of it himself, or how his father became suddenly rich. He must have been a child of barely ten, at the time Belmont, senior, came home directly after securing the jewels, thinking that the only two people in the world who knew of their existence were dead. Any tale he chose to concoct of having made a fortune would naturally be believed. Probably he gave liberally to the local charities, and was 'a pillar' of the particular church or chapel which he favoured

with his patronage. That generally whitewashes a man, and makes people believe in him, whatever his past may have been.

"That's all perfectly clear, so far. I'd better see Major Dennis. He's a gossip sort of fool, and I ought to get any further information I may want out of him, together with an introduction to this Arthur Belmont, and we'll see him, and make sure of the facts. And if he is the man who has had the use of the money which ought to have come to me, and the son of my father's murderer—well—God help him, that's all."

The man who was so interested in Arthur Belmont's history was a dark, keen looking man of about forty-four. More than twenty years before he had been left an orphan, with barely sufficient means to complete his education and to enable him to take his doctor's degree. As a youth he had been looked upon by his fellow-students as "Deuced clever, but infernally hard up, don't 'cher know!" And when, shortly after passing his final, he announced his intention of setting up as a fashionable doctor in the West End, their astonishment as to how he had procured the necessary capital was naturally great.

He explained that he had unexpectedly come into some money, but would give no further particulars.

A man of intense brain-power, he had, in his student days been attracted to the study of hypnotism. The fascination of the science had so grown upon him that he had devoted some years to its special study, and had become intensely skilled in its practice. He had an intimate knowledge of all the various schools of hypnotism that were in vogue on the Continent, his own system being that of suggestion, as taught in the School of Nancy.

His iron will, his strong self-control, the strength with which he had fought the battle of life against the heavy odds of poverty, all tended to make him cold-blooded and heartless. Friends he had none; acquaintances by the score. And though he despised the men who courted his society, and the women who flattered him, he invariably met them with the polish of a man of the world, bland, suave and genial.

In spite of adverse public opinion he practised hypnotism in his profession, using it with great success in various cases of functional neurosis.

In most instances, however, he merely adopted it with a view to an ulterior end, which end he carefully cloaked under an assumed sympathetic interest in the subject.

But deep in his keen, calculating brain was a tiny flaw—a flaw that had descended to him by the relentless law of heredity. His great-grandfather on the maternal side had been afflicted in early life with a slight trace of insanity, and the disease, latent during two generations, had reappeared in the third, in a curious and abnormal manner.

The inherited instability of his higher nerve-regions caused the stress of his earlier years of student's toil and professional worry to act with an effect that, had he been in easier circumstances, would, perhaps, never have been produced.

It found its expression in a bent of instinctive criminality, slight at first, but intensified by his extraordinary mental activity, and by the knowledge of his power over others. To him every kind of subtle, intellectual, scientific crime came as second nature. And with the skill to plan and execute came the skill to evade the consequences of his actions. Criminality was to him a hobby, a relaxation from severe scientific research. He brought his powerful brain and brilliant inventive faculties to the subject, and it was to him as ordinary amusements are to other men. His utter lack of moral sensibility enabled him to commit crimes at which many hardened criminals would have recoiled, and caused him to manifest cynical and contemplative delight in inflicting suffering for the mere gratification of experiencing the emotion of power while so doing.

While he was yet a young man, he had come across the entry in his father's diary. He had been convinced then that Belmont was the murderer, and had vowed to some day hunt him down, and, if the treasure actually existed, to secure the share that should have descended to him, and become the avenger of his father at the same time.

Even now, when his professional success was assured, and he was fairly well off, his lust for revenge, and the chance of acquiring a possible fortune, were still ever in his thoughts.

III.

THE next afternoon the Doctor strolled round to the club, where he knew Major Dennis was in the habit of indulging in billiards. He found him idly knocking the balls about.

"Hullo!" said Dennis, as the Doctor entered, "it isn't often you are out of your den this time of day."

"I came specially to see you, Major; just had the offer of a hack at a remarkably low figure, and I wanted to ask your advice on the matter, as I know you're a good judge of horseflesh."

"Delighted, my dear boy! I'll have a look at it whenever you like. Will you give me a hundred up? I'm just waiting for a game."

"With pleasure," replied the Doctor, choosing a cue.

"I say, Doctor, if you really want a first-class horse, there's a friend of mine in Leicestershire, who is getting rid of part of his stud, as he is going to be married shortly, and I've no doubt you would be able to pick one up cheap from him. He's coming up to town in a week or two, and is sure to look me up. I'll let you know when he's coming, and you can come round to my diggings one night, and see him about it."

"You don't mean Lascelles, of Leicester, do you? He has a good name up there for horses."

"No, it's Arthur Belmont. He lives at Kneston, just outside the town, and a fine place he keeps up, too. I never heard where he got his money from, but he's got enough of it—lucky devil! Besides his bank balances and investments, he has a second fortune in jewels. Makes a hobby of them, I believe. I've never seen such a collection of stones. But, there, I'll arrange for you to meet him."

"Thanks, Major," replied the Doctor, with a bland smile, "I shall be most happy to make his acquaintance. My shot? How's the score?"

"75 to 33; I lead. Any odds you like on me for this game, Doctor."

"Yes, I must pull up, or you'll run out." And he played a careful and finished break of 42, that showed his complete mastery over the balls when he chose to exert himself. He finished with a safety miss, and chuckled.

"There, Major, how are the odds now, eh? That makes it a better game—75 to your 76. I don't grudge you the odd one. Never bet unless you're certain. That's an excellent old rule in life as well as in billiards."

"Well, I'm damned; you're a perfect juggler with the balls. Just as I thought I had the game in my own hands, too!" And the Major screwed his eyeglass viciously into his eye, as he made his next shot. His attempt to score, however, was fruitless, and the Doctor, picking up his cue, ran out an easy winner.

"Thanks for the game, Major. I must be off; professional engagements won't wait for billiards, y'know. Give you your revenge another day."

"I'm really not surprised that Arthur Belmont is fond of jewels," he mused, as he walked homeward. "From what the Major says, I should think he's a bit of a collector and connoisseur. All the better; he'll be easier to draw. I really think my time is coming at last. What care I whether it be this man or his father who wronged me? The father's dead, and I'll take my revenge on the son. After all, he's merely a unit, an organism, and if I can make any use of him, I'll do it. I must get possession of my part of the property first, and then I'll consider whether it will be advisable to bring to an abrupt conclusion his adaptation to environment. That sounds better than saying, 'I'll kill him,' or rather, that I will be the means of his death. But let me forget all about the matter until I hear from Dennis. By Jove, what an exquisite bit of sky!" he added, glancing upward.

A week later Dr. Makyne received a note from Major Dennis, asking him to come round the same night to meet Arthur Belmont. Before leaving his house, he took from a jewel-case an antique Egyptian signet ring, with a curiously carved stone, which, set in a hoop of gold, revolved on its own axis. On one side was engraved the typical



"HE TOOK FROM A JEWEL CASE AN ANTIQUE EGYPTIAN SIGNET RING."

face of an Egyptian beauty, and on the reverse was the semblance of a death's head, in which the sockets of the eyes were set with emeralds, giving a ghastly and uncanny appearance to the wearer's hand.

"That's a ring that ought to excite his interest, if he's anything of the lover of jewels that Dennis says he is," he muttered, slipping it on his finger, with the death's head turned outward.

"Come in, Doctor, called out the Major, as the servant opened the door. "Let me introduce you to my friend, Belmont. I was just telling him that you wanted to buy a horse." And the three men fell to discussing horseflesh and stable lore.

"Well," said Belmont, finally, "it you will give me the pleasure of putting you and your wife up for a few days at

my place at Kneston, after I return from my honeymoon, I shall be delighted, and then you can have your pick of the gees before they go up for auction."

"For my own part, I most readily accept; but as for my wife," the Doctor added, laughing, "you know, a bachelor isn't supposed to have one."

"Why, I certainly took you for a married man, Doctor. I thought most medical men were so, if only out of deference to Mrs. Grundy."

"My dear fellow, I ignore Mrs. Grundy entirely, and I have always looked upon my life, with its scientific interests and pursuits, as an exact mathematical problem, expressed in terms of precision and clearness, the corresponding sequences of which will be both logical and complete. Surely you would not have me introduce into this equation that unknown quantity—woman?"

"Bravo, Doctor!" chimed in the Major. "I don't know what you mean, but it's just what I think about it. I don't worry much about the logical sequences and mathematical problems, or whatever you call 'em, of my life—dodging bullets and looking after troop horses has been more in my line—but I think that woman's a damned nuisance, and I suppose that's just about what you mean, eh?"

"It's all very well for you two hardened bachelors to talk of woman in this way," said Belmont. "I think she's the choicest flower of earth. You know, 'God made man a little lower than the angels, and woman a little above 'em.'"

"Good idea," growled the Major, "only you've got it the wrong way round; but engaged men are permitted to rave, y'know. Where the deuce did you get that ring from, Makyne? It's been worrying me for the last ten minutes," he added, with his usual bluntness. "Let's have a look at it."

"There's a history connected with it, I dare say," replied the Doctor, as he handed it to the Major. "I picked it up at a sale a year or two ago. It has some amount of value, I believe."

"I should think it had," exclaimed Belmont, "It looks like an Egyptian; antique, too, I should say. Those revolving signets are very distinctive."

"I see you are something of a con-

noisseur," said the doctor, "I'm rather interested in jewels myself, I have a small collection, principally antique."

"Yes," returned Belmont, "I am rather keen on the subject. I have a very fair collection of old Indian specimens; they were brought home by my father a few years after the mutiny. How he got them, I never knew. One doesn't enquire too closely into the financial operations of those times. There were originally more, I believe, but he disposed of some, shortly after leaving India."

"Then you will be able to criticise mine. You must come round one day, I shall value your opinion."

"I will, with pleasure, I'm always glad to meet with a fellow-lover of old stones."

* * * *

"Good morning, Doctor," said Belmont's jovial voice, as he was ushered into Dr. Makyne's study, a couple of days later. "You see, I've kept my promise. I'm as bad as a society girl, when jewels are the attraction."

"Come in, my dear fellow, and make yourself at home," said the Doctor, shaking hands heartily. "You're just in time to join me in a cigar before lunch. I can offer you something choice in the way of Havannas; I flatter myself I'm a good judge in that line." And he pulled forward an easy chair, and made his visitor comfortable,

"I'm afraid my collection is not a very grand one, but I have one or two rather choice specimens," he went on, unlocking a cabinet and drawing out a box of Oriental workmanship, curiously carved, and apparently of great age.

"You've an uncommonly quaint box to keep 'em in, anyway," said Belmont, examining it with interest.

"Yes, it belonged to my father, and was sent home with his effects after he died in India. There is a strange story connected with it, that I will perhaps tell you some day." And the speaker chuckled to himself, as he thought how little his listener guessed that the story was of vital importance to him.

He took from the box a few rare specimens of rings, and chains, and Belmont criticised and approved with that zest of which only an enthusiast is capable.

"This is a fine piece of work," he exclaimed at length, holding up a delicate anklet, carved and pierced in a thousand fantastic shapes. "I have one almost identical, but mine is even finer in workmanship."

"Nonsense," said the Doctor; "why, I regard that as exceedingly fine, perhaps the finest specimen of that particular style extant. Modern goldsmiths seem to have lost the art of such delicate piercing, and most of the so-called genuine native work is manufactured to order in the Indian province of Birmingham."

"I'd like to bet you, Doctor, that mine's finer."

"I should be robbing you, my dear fellow. There isn't a finer in the world. But just for the sake of a friendly bet, I will wager you a box of cigars on it, and you can bring your collection round here one day, and we can compare."

"Right, I will. I have the jewels in town with me. They are keeping them in the safe at my hotel, until we get settled. I brought them up to let Miss Shafton make her choice from them for a wedding gift. I mean to surprise her," he added with a smile, "she doesn't even know I have them with me."

"That's a bet then, and as you're bound to lose, have another cigar now." And the Doctor smiled as he passed the box.

"No, no more, Doctor. They're excellent, but ever since I was thrown in the hunting field, a couple of seasons ago, I have been subject to attacks of giddiness, and smoking much before meals seems to bring them on. That one cigar, even, has made my head feel a bit dizzy."

"That's bad. What do you do for it? A little patching up would soon put you all right."

"Well, I thought I'd ask your advice on the matter;" and Belmont gave an account of his symptoms. "I heard from Major Dennis that you practise hypnotism for nervous complaints, and perhaps you can cure me by that. Everything I've tried seems no use."

"Certainly. Nothing easier. It is just in such cases as this that the value of suggestion becomes immense."

"I don't know much about mesmerism, or hypnotism, or whatever you call it, Doctor, but I've seen professionals do some queer things at the music halls."

"Three-fourths pure trickery. Very widely different from hypnotic suggestion as taught by the modern scientific schools. Put shortly, hypnotism is nothing more than a particular mental state in which susceptibility to suggestion is heightened. The use of hypnotism to medical men is founded on the premiss that many nervous diseases can be cured, or relieved, merely by making the patient believe that he will soon be better."

"Let me put you to sleep, and suggest that your giddiness will pass away, and you will be all right in five minutes."

"Now try to sleep, think of nothing but that you are to go to sleep. Lie back in that chair, you will be more rested and feel easier; you look tired already, your eyelids are beginning to close. You are feeling more and more fatigued all over—your head is so heavy that it is falling forward—your eyes are quite closed now, your thinking powers are getting dull and confused, you are nearly asleep, now you are quite off. Fast asleep!"

The Doctor kept his eyes fixed intently on his subject.

"You are still asleep?" he asked after a few moments.

"Yes," answered Belmont drowsily.

"Fast asleep?"

"Yes."

"But you can hear the ticking of this watch," and he held a sheet of paper to Belmont's ear.

"Yes, perfectly."

"Excellent," said the Doctor to himself. "An organisation most susceptible to hypnotic suggestion. Perfect hypnosis induced at first attempt. This ought to lead to some interesting experiments. But he will need some two or three weeks' training. He told me the wedding would not be for a month yet, that ought to give me ample time for—for any experiments I may deem advisable in the interests of science, or—of myself."

He stood motionless, gazing intently at Belmont. For years had he en-

deavoured to trace out the murderer of his father, and now at last, he had every reason to believe that the murderer's son was in his power; but of this he still required absolute proof.

"Arthur Belmont," he said, addressing the hypnotic, "were you with your father when he died?"

"Yes," Belmont answered in a quiet, steady voice, only a shade different from his normal tones.

"He died in '84, did he not?"

"Yes."

"He came from India, and had in his possession a valuable collection of jewels, I think?"

"Yes."

"Now—you are to tell me everything he said just before he died, everything that you heard.

"There's just a chance that old Belmont let drop some word about his secret," the Doctor went on to himself, "one word is all I want to make sure.

"Tell me," he repeated aloud.

Belmont started without any hesitation, and speaking freely and easily as though he were repeating some well-learned lesson.

"It was only for Arthur's sake I did it. The old woman was right—Curse you, I will have them all—How his eyes stared and his face turned livid—My knife!—Ha! Varuna has another offering—Poor old Jack, and no one knew. The papers said it was a native——"

"Stop," said the Doctor.

And Belmont ceased talking.

A smile of grim satisfaction played about the Doctor's hard lips. His search of years was ended, and before him, peacefully wrapped in hypnotic sleep, was the son of the man who had murdered and robbed his father.

"Your giddiness is passing off now," he said. "How do you feel? Better?"

"Yes, I think it is," Belmont answered; "I feel much better."

"It will be better still in a moment, and when you wake up, it will be quite gone, and you will forget everything you've said, and simply think you've had a little nap. Wake up now, and try another cigar."

Belmont opened his eyes, and stretched himself.

"I really beg your pardon, Doctor, I do believe I dropped off to sleep; I was extra late last night, and——"

The Doctor laughed.

"Don't apologise, my dear fellow, at all. How's your giddiness? Any better?"

"It's gone. Suddenly this time. These attacks generally last an hour or so."

"Well, next time you feel one of them coming on, give me a look up, and I'll cure you permanently in a week or two. I thought I could manage to take it away this time."

"Why—you don't mean to say you hypnotised me, surely?"

"No," smiled the doctor, "I merely suggested to you, while you were asleep, that you felt better, and you fell in with my suggestion. I told you hypnotism was nothing more than suggestion, you know."

"Well, it's served my turn this time. I'll certainly come and see you when next I feel at all queer, and I shall be glad if you will look upon me as a case for your skill."

"Thanks, I will. Now, have another cigar. It won't hurt you this time."

"Thank you, I don't think it will, though I haven't been able to smoke two cigars running since I had that smash. You've worked wonders, doctor."

"Science does sometimes," replied the doctor, with a slight smile.

Arthur Belmont felt instinctively attracted to Dr. Makyne. He had fallen under the spell of the geniality of manner, the intimate knowledge the doctor had of men and things, and the pleasant, easy familiarity with which he was welcomed to the house in Harley Street. He had had recurrences of the giddiness of which he had complained, and had, time after time, availed himself of Dr. Makyne's hypnotic power to relieve it.

But unconsciously he had by slow but certain degrees fallen under the domination of the superior will, for in each succeeding hypnosis the doctor had increased his power over his subject, and had brought him to such a state of hypnotic training, that Belmont's will and mind were entirely under the doctor's control, without the subject

being aware of the fact in his waking moments.

It was some weeks after their first introduction, and but a few days to the wedding, that the doctor had asked Belmont to bring the jewels from his hotel for examination and comparison.

Belmont had readily consented, and the next evening the two men were sitting in the doctor's study deeply engaged in discussing the merits of the various specimens.

Dr. Makyne looked worried and anxious, so much so, that Belmont noticed it.

"Why, doctor, you're looking quite knocked up; I thought a brain like yours could stand any amount of hard work. You've been overdoing it."

The doctor laughed. "Yes," he replied, "I do feel a bit worried, I

suppose. The fact is, I have an important experiment to undertake to-night, and if I fail, it might possibly affect my reputation."

"No fear of your failing, I should say. You high priests of science seem to have the power of invoking success in whatever you attempt."

"Thanks. I accept your compliment as an augury of my good fortune and success."

He half rose from his chair as he spoke. He was sitting opposite Belmont, the table, spread with the glittering and precious collection, between them.

"Arthur Belmont," he said, in a low penetrating voice, fixing his companion with his piercing, cold eyes, "these jewels, which you have brought to my house to-night, are not your own. They were stolen by your father from mine, and they are now coming back to their rightful owner, myself."

"Sit still! Your will is under my control, and you cannot move or prevent my actions. Your—will—is—under—my—control," he repeated slowly, settling himself back in his chair, but still keeping his eyes on his victim, fascinating him by their intense power.

Belmont sat huddled together, unable to move, save to follow the doctor's movements with his eyes. His face had grown pallid and lined with fear, and his eyes had that dumb look of agony at an approaching fate that the doctor had seen so often in those of a dog when he was slowly torturing it to death, "in the interests of scientific investigation."

"Listen;" he went on. "Years ago, in India, your father



"SIT STILL! YOUR WILL IS UNDER MY CONTROL!"

murdered mine for the sake of these very jewels. You gave me the final proof of that fact when you repeated the words that he uttered on his deathbed when I first hypnotised you. What did you think of those words at the time? Answer me."

"We thought he was raving; he had a touch of fever for some days before his death. I never thought, I never knew—oh, my God!"—the voice broke off in a wail of agony—"you—you are torturing me. I swear I never thought the words were true, or that it was of his own acts he was speaking."

"That may be so; it matters little now. What does matter is that I had to suffer for the lack of the money you were enjoying. Now it is my chance of adjusting the balance, and I mean to do so. I intend to regain my father's share of the treasure and to avenge his death at the same time. You will leave these jewels here, and when you go from this house, you will entirely forget that such jewels ever existed, except that, should the hotel people inquire after them, you will say that you have left them for better security at your London banker's. No other people here know you have them in town. You told me, I think, that you informed no one, as you wished to surprise your bride by letting her make a selection for her wedding gift.

"Afterwards, if your friends should ask—but that, I think, will be immaterial, when the next few days have passed—" and the doctor laughed a vicious little laugh which came to his lips but not his eyes, as if some hidden thought had suddenly appealed to him and amused him—

"Your memory of these jewels will be an absolute blank, and you will even forget that you ever were interested in such things," he repeated, to the crouching, shrinking figure in the chair before him.

"So much for the jewels. Now listen to me further, Arthur Belmont. I am a scientist, and the pursuit of scientific investigations is my very life. There is one experiment I have long wanted to undertake, but a suitable human organisation had not been found till I met you.

"I have studied your mental characteristics with the greatest care and com-

pleteness, since my good friend, Major Dennis, introduced you to me. I owe him a deeper debt of gratitude than I think he can ever be aware of, by the way. I have made full notes on the hypnoses that you have been in, and of your symptoms, and have come to the conclusion that you are an admirable subject for my purpose. You quite follow me so far?"

"I—quite—follow—you." The words were jerked out from the parched and whitened lips, as if some involuntary power, apart from the action of the throat, impelled their utterance.

"Very well. Next Thursday you will be standing before the altar with your bride. You doubtless know the form of the Marriage Service. I must admit that personally I am better acquainted with scientific rather than with religious formulæ."

He took a Prayer-book from the bookcase and turned to the Form of Solemnization of Matrimony, and went on—

"You will come to the part where you plight your troth and will be required to say after the priest:—'I, Arthur Belmont, take thee . . . in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish. . . .'"

The doctor stopped. Belmont still sat motionless in a condition of deep hypnosis, his widely staring eyes following the doctor with a look of intense horror and despair, which played over his face like a wave, distorting it in a ghastly and inhuman manner.

Dr. Makyne keenly observed the effect his words produced, and laid down the Prayer-book in order to note them in his case-book before going on speaking.

"'Mental emotion under suggestion produces similar results as physical.' I remember a woman we experimented on in the Bicêtre at Paris years ago, to whom I suggested that her flesh was being torn off with red-hot pincers. Her expressions and reflexes were very similar to the present ones. This is worth noting."

He went on speaking to Belmont, leaning towards him and dropping his voice, that any chance servant passing the door might not hear.

"When you reach the next sentence at the word 'part,' you will——" and he leaned still closer and whispered in Belmont's ear words that caused the whole

expression of the hypnotic to assume a still more intense horror, and his face to twist and writhe, till it seemed to shrivel up, as if the blast of a furnace had passed over it.

Dr. Makyne drew back and watched the effect of his suggestion—at first with an unmoved face and then with a slight pleased smile, as of an artist who contemplates a neatly touched-in sketch.

"I think my experiment is in a fair way to succeed, and that it will clear up a point in hypnotism about which, I must confess, I have been somewhat sceptical. We shall know the result by Thursday, at any rate. At present we can do no more, except to replace these jewels in their old resting-place, from which they have been absent so long.

"I must awaken him gently and by degrees this time," he went on, as he thrust the box into the cabinet and locked it. "I have rarely seen such a deep hypnosis."

He paused a moment, and then spoke in a softer voice:

"You are looking better now, Belmont. You had a nasty touch of neuralgia, but it's wearing off. You will be quite free from pain in a minute. Here is a volume of Longfellow, my favourite poet," and he laid an open book on the table. "Presently, when you wake up, you will think you've been absorbed in reading, and be asking for a cigar, forgetting everything you have dreamed, until that moment I mentioned to you next Thursday. *Then* you will remember. Now," he added, glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece, which pointed to a few minutes to nine, "when the clock strikes nine, wake up."

He strolled to the other end of the room, and stood admiring the soft beauty of a water-colour, when the clock commenced chiming, and almost simultaneously came Belmont's usual clear, pleasant voice—

"Doctor, I think I'll try another of your cigars. I was so interested in the immortal Miles Standish that I've let this go out, and it spoils a good cigar to re-light it."

"Certainly," replied the Doctor, turning round; "help yourself. It's awfully good of you to come and help

an old bachelor get through them. Oh, by the way, I want you to look at this old Indian bangle I bought at a sale. It's very ancient, and rather valuable, I believe. Are you a judge of such things?"

"Not I, Doctor. I can tell you the points of a good foxhound, or talk to you about the latest pattern of a gun, but I never took any interest in jewellery. Just wear a ring or two myself, but that's all."

"Ah! It's a very interesting subject, though," replied the Doctor, drily.

"Yes," he added to himself, "I really think my experiment will succeed."

IV.

Dr. Makyne sat in his study, filling in some details to the notes he had made on the case of Belmont. He laid down his pen, and leaned back in the softly-padded chair, glancing at his watch, which he placed on the table in front of him.

"Ten minutes to twelve. I won't add the final note until I am certain, and that won't be for an hour or more yet. Let's see—wedding timed for twelve. The critical point will be reached by about twelve-fifteen. That's as near as we can estimate. Then they will wire to Fleet Street. Nearest telegraph office to St. George's Church is in Grosvenor Street, a short three-minutes' walk—say two, for an enterprising reporter in a hurry. That will catch the one o'clock edition nicely, and the boys will have the papers up here inside another ten minutes, now that they all ride machines. That's about an hour and a-quarter. Time for a cigar and a liqueur before lunch.

He rose, and going to a cigar cabinet on the sideboard, chose, with care, a choice cigar, lit it, and poured out a glass of Chartreuse.

Passing the bookcase, as he sauntered back to his seat, he paused a moment to select a volume from its well-stocked shelves, and then settled himself luxuriously in his easy chair.

"I believe in a perfectly equable enjoyment of life, as far as is possible in man," he would have said. "When I was poor and in hardship, I was happy, and now that I am rich and in comfort,

I am exactly the same. It is only the environments that have altered."

He opened the book, and turned to the lines—

*"I stood upon the hills, when Heaven's high
arch
Was glorious with the sun's returning march,
And woods were brightened, and soft gales
Went forth to kiss the sun-clad vales. . . .
If thou art worn and hard beset
With sorrows that thou wouldst forget,
If thou wouldst read a lesson, that will keep
Thy heart from fainting and thy soul from
sleep,
Go to the woods and hills! No tears
Dim the sweet look that Nature wears."*

He re-read the words slowly, and laid the book down.

"Ah," he said to himself, "how exquisitely Longfellow has written of Nature's beauties! How his poetry appeals to one's sense of peace and harmony!"

* * * * *

"Happy the bride that the sun shines upon." And if the same remark applies to a bridegroom, Belmont should indeed have been happy, for the morning of the 16th June, in London, was as if it had been brought from the Sunny South.

The church was filled with that throng of fashionable people to whom a Society wedding is as attractive as a remnant sale to the ordinary British matron. The sunlight streamed in through the stained glass windows, adding a further charm to the many and delicate shades of the silks and satins with which the average Society woman seeks to rival "Solomon in all his glory."

Belmont was laughing and chatting in the vestry with his best man, waiting the moment when he should join his bride at the altar.

"Never felt better in my life," he said, in reply to a query.

"That's all right, then. And so you ought, marrying a girl like that, you lucky devil. Now I'm responsible for you for the next few minutes, until you *are* married, so just do as I tell you. Don't drop the ring when I pass it to you, so that I have to go on my knees and grovel for it; and if you want to sneeze at all, just arrange that it shan't happen when the Parson Johnny asks

you if you'll have her; and, above all, when he tells you to take her hand, don't ask, 'What's trumps?' Sounds bad, y'know."

"All right," said Belmont, laughing; "I'll remember. Look out! here they come!" And they left the vestry to meet the bride and her father.

The service started. The first responses had been made, and the bridegroom commenced repeating after the officiating clergyman—

"I, Arthur Belmont, take thee, Violet Neville Shafton, to be my wedded wife——"

With some surprise the best man noticed a slight hesitation in Belmont's speech, and a sudden pallor that overspread his face. The hesitation and pallor, however, both appeared to be but momentary, and he continued in a firm, clear voice:—"to have and to hold, from this time forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness, in health, to love and to cherish, till—death—do—us—part——"

The soft stillness of the church was suddenly broken by a piercing shriek from the bride; for the words "till death do us part" had been uttered by the bridegroom in a voice growing gradually slower and slower, until the last word came with a horrible gasp, an expression of intense mental agony passing over his face, as he fell, with a low moan, across the altar steps, his head striking the sharp edge, and staining their fair whiteness with a dull stream of crimson.

* * * * *

In his study the Doctor sat wrapped in thought, pondering over his Longfellow, as he had so often done before, when he was aroused from his reverie by the clock chiming a quarter past one. He put the book down, and paced the room, straining his ears to every sound in the streets.

Suddenly he stopped, and flung up the window and listened intently, as he heard the newsboys shrilling the words of their contents bills:

"Speshul 'dishun! 'Orrible tragedy at fashionable wedding! Bridegroom drops dead at the altar!"

He bought a paper as the lad passed

the window, and turning to the stop-press telegram, read with a satisfied smile: "At the wedding of Mr. Arthur Belmont and the Hon. Violet Shafton, at St. George's Church, this morning, the bridegroom dropped dead, from heart disease, at the altar steps."

He walked to the table, and completed his memoranda on the case, with the sentence—

"On the 16th of June, Arthur Belmont died from cardiac failure."

He blotted the words, and locked the papers away in his safe.

"My theory is proved, then. Death can be caused by post-hypnotic suggestion."

He rang the bell, and the page appeared.

"Is luncheon served yet?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, it's just going in."

And Dr. Makyne strolled in to lunch with a calm and contented manner—and a most excellent appetite.





ILLUSTRATED BY LOUIS KIGHT

CAPTAIN the Honourable Maurice Brazabon, of the Folkestone Fusiliers, hated "niggers," under which generic designation he included all the dark-skinned races of the world. The gallant officer's education had been neglected; his knowledge of ethnography, as of everything else, was limited; his ill-spelt letters would have disgraced an eleven-year-old Board School child. The mighty Robin himself, prince of Army crammers, who has reduced to an exact science the art of inserting temporary stuffing into empty skulls, recognising that the "preparation" of the Hon. Maurice was a feat beyond his powers, had consented to undertake the job only after receiving a hint that this unpromising aspirant to martial glory had influential friends in high places. Suffice it to add that the favoured candidate

passed his examination, and was duly gazetted to a commission in Her Majesty's Army.

At the time our story opens, the Folkestone Fusiliers were quartered at Poona, and Brazabon, with his wife and child, were residing in a bungalow in the Ghorpurri lines. The natives of India were regarded by Captain Brazabon with an intensity of loathing and detestation amounting almost to madness.

"I can't keep my hands off the brutes," he would say. "The very sight of them is nauseous to me. A set of dirty heathens, ignorant, soulless, and deceitful. I cannot understand for what purpose they were brought into the world, unless to be the slaves of white men."

After enunciating which sentiments, this scion of a noble race would give his straw-coloured moustache an aggressive twirl, screw his eye-glass firmly into hi

pale, watery blue eye, and stare at his auditor, with an expression on his vacuous countenance intended to indicate that he himself was a being of quite an exceptional type—which, indeed, he was.

The Captain showered blows and abuse freely upon his Indian servants, never losing an opportunity of administering a kick or a cuff to those humble dependents; but the brunt of his displeasure fell upon one Dhondi, a Mah-ratta *syce* (groom), whose swarthy hide bore visible signs of constant flagellation. Dhondi submitted without a murmur to the ill-treatment so unjustly accorded to him; he had served his time as a battery *syce*, in both senses of the term, and had learnt to regard his daily castigations as a part of his lot upon earth, against which it would be idle to complain. He had several mouths to feed, and it was wonderful how he managed to maintain his mother, wife, and four children on his starvation wage of seven rupees a month. Captain Brazabon, who prided himself on his generosity and hospitality, and spared no expense in entertaining his friends, grudged nevertheless every farthing of the miserable pittance with which the wretched menials in his employ strove to keep body and soul together. On one occasion, when Dhondi had begged humbly for an increase of one rupee a month to his pay, his master had struck him a savage blow, exclaiming with an oath that he received a great deal more than he deserved.

Although the long-suffering Dhondi himself continued to perform his duties cheerfully and uncomplainingly, there was one member of his household who prayed night and day to the Hindoo gods for vengeance on the cruel taskmaster. Old, half-witted Ramabhai, Dhondi's mother, in whose memory the events of the Sepoy Mutiny were yet green, predicted that Brazabon Sâhib would be visited for his sins with a terrible retribution; but the other servants, regarding her as a harmless imbecile, paid little heed to her ravings.

* * * *

The Folkestone Fusiliers were to be inspected by the General, and Brazabon

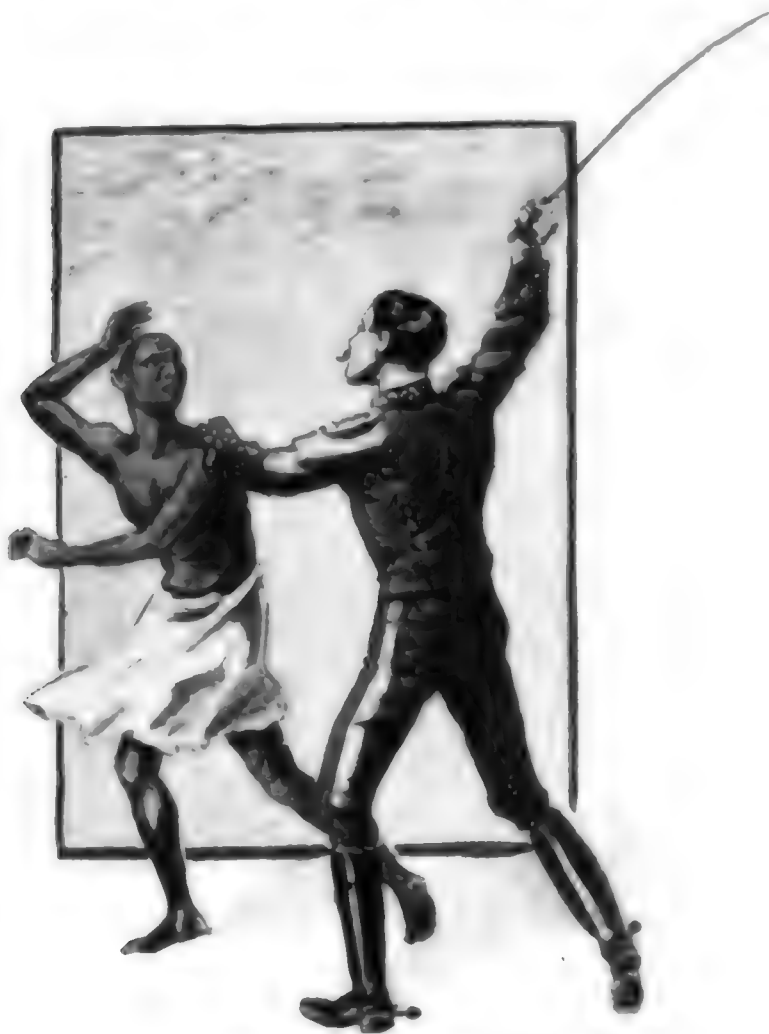
had ordered Dhondi to have his pony ready at half-past six on the morning of the inspection. The second bugle was still sounding when the Captain, the very pink of smartness, stepped jauntily out into the porch, and called for the pony. His call met with no response: not a soul seemed to be stirring in the compound. He turned livid with rage, and rushing to the stable, found Dhondi fast asleep on the floor. Rousing the delinquent with a vicious kick in the naked ribs, and pouring forth a volley of angry abuse, he ordered him to saddle and bridle the animal with all despatch. Brazabon, as he superintended the operation, was ugly to look upon; his features were contorted with fury; he gnashed his teeth savagely, stamped on the ground, and actually foamed at the mouth with the intensity of his passion. Fain would he have meted out punishment to Dhondi then and there, but, through fear of occasioning further delay, restrained himself, with the determination to wreak a full measure of vengeance so soon as he should have returned from parade.

The unfortunate *syce*, alarmed by the terrible look in his master's face, and by his curses and threats, trembled so violently that he could scarcely buckle the girths. At last Brazabon was in the saddle, cantering smartly down the Cantonment road, with Dhondi following, panting, and breathless. "I'll cut the heart out of you, you black thief, for making me late for parade," was his Parthian shaft, as, leaping from the saddle, and throwing the reins to the *syce*, he hurried towards the parade ground, where, to his dismay, the regiment had already fallen in. Every eye of the battalion was upon him, as he made his way shamefacedly to his own company; and he was aware that the Colonel was regarding him with a look of stern disapproval. The cup of his humiliation was full when the General rebuked him in the presence of the regiment for his unpunctuality.

Captain Brazabon returned from parade in a very savage mood. His wife, leading his little daughter by the hand, came out into the garden to meet him, so he was constrained to defer the execution of his vengeance till a more

fitting opportunity. The demon of wrath was raging so fiercely in his bosom, that he gave but short and sullen answers to all questions addressed to him; and the child, looking up into his face, with large, innocent eyes, wondered what had made her Dad so angry. After breakfast, Brazabon, arming himself with a cutting whip, repaired to the stables where Dhondi, naked to the waist, was rubbing down the pony and secretly congratulating

crowd of servants with their wives and children, who, gathering round, begged the Sahib to desist. Their words fell on deaf ears. Brazabon, unsoftened by the piteous pleading of Dhondi's wife and mother, and by the weeping of the poor little half-starved children, who thought that their father was being murdered, continued his task with brutal persistency, covering the naked body with deep weals. Desisting at last, through sheer exhaustion, he flung



"BEGAN TO THRASH HIM VICIOUSLY"

himself on having escaped the promised punishment. Brazabon, with an evil scowl on his face, seized the unfortunate man by the scruff of the neck, dragged him out into the compound, and began to thrash him viciously on head, face, body and limbs—whichever part presented itself to the stroke.

Dhondi's cries brought out a small

his helpless victim, a bleeding, inert mass of humanity, on to the ground, and strode away saying, "That'll teach you to make me late for parade again, you black scoundrel!"

That evening, Captain and Mrs. Brazabon, at dinner, were disturbed by the sound of loud wailing in the compound without.

"Go and tell those niggers to stop that infernal row, or I'll come out and half-murder some of them," roared the Captain angrily to the butler. "How often have I told you that I object to a noise in the compound?"

"Please Sâhib," answered the man mildly, "Dhondi dying just now. His mother and wife make cry. No can stop. When man die, women crying always like that."

"Oh, Maurice," said Mrs. Brazabon in tones of alarm, after the butler had left the room, "it would be a dreadful thing if Dhondi were to die; they would say you had killed him."

"They may say what they please; it would be a d——d lie," retorted Brazabon. "The fellow is a feeble creature, not worth his salt, continually shamming sick, and shirking his work on every possible occasion. He might die any day, and it wouldn't be my fault. I am sure the hiding I gave him this morning, which he richly deserved, could make no difference."

"Hush! Maurice, I cannot bear to hear you speak like that of a fellow-creature."

"A fellow-creature! Do you call a *syce* a fellow-creature? Well, I don't. Besides, a nigger the less in the world will never be missed," was the brutal response. "However, I'll take the precaution of squaring his family; as, if the native press were to get wind of the affair, it might be a bit awkward for me. Fifty rupees will do the job effectually, I fancy; though it's a long price to pay for a nigger."

Mrs. Brazabon, deeply shocked, rose and left the room without replying, knowing the futility of arguing with her husband in his present frame of mind.

The next morning, the family party were seated in the verandah, when an aged crone, with yellowy-white locks, and a brown, parchment face, deeply seamed with wrinkles, prostrated herself on the ground before them, and raising a skinny forefinger menacingly, began to mumble out in the Mahratta tongue what sounded like a curse. Neither Captain Brazabon nor his wife could understand what she said, but little Bella, gazing curiously at the

prostrate figure, interpreted the drift of her speech.

"She says Daddy has killed Dhondi, and that he will be punished for it," exclaimed the child in frightened tones. "She keeps on repeating, 'Three lives! three lives!' but I don't know what she means by that."

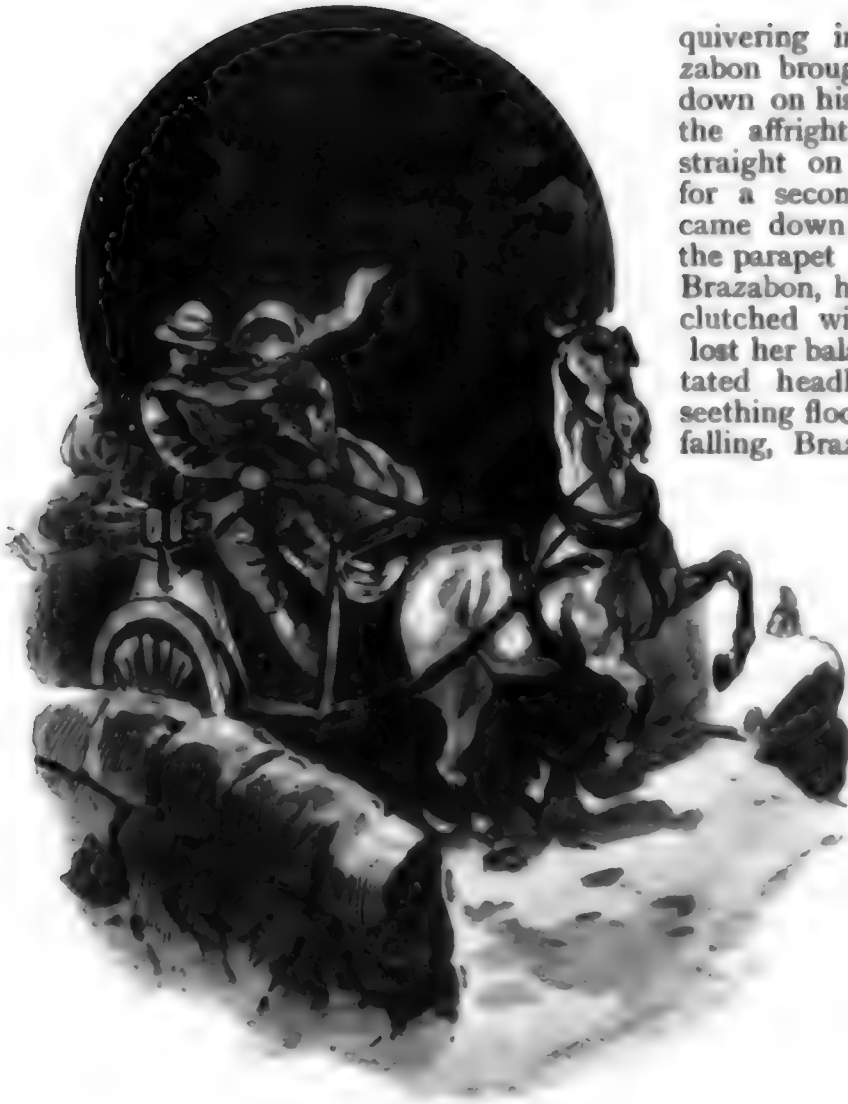
Brazabon, summoning the butler, told him to inform the old woman that if she would agree to hush the matter up she should receive a present of fifty rupees, to be paid at the end of three months; but that if, in the meantime, she breathed a word to anyone of what had occurred, she should receive nothing, and should be turned out of her house in the compound.

"That'll stop the old hag's mouth. I know these niggers well; they would sell their souls for money," he said to his wife. But, after the old woman had hobbled away, the butler informed him, to his infinite surprise and disgust, that Ramabhai had declared that she and Dhondi's mother and children would rather starve than touch a farthing of of the Sâhib's money.

"More fools they," observed Brazabon, contemptuously, with a sense of virtuous indignation at his generous offer being refused.

Captain Brazabon engaged another *syce*, and dismissed from his mind all thoughts of the ill-fated Dhondi. Some three months later, he was driving his wife home at dusk in a dog-cart from Kirkee, and while crossing the Wellesley Bridge, with its narrow and dangerous road lined by flimsy, low parapets, had pulled the horse up to a walk. Though they had passed no living being on the last half-mile of the road, Mrs. Brazabon became suddenly aware of a strange, unnatural presence, and, looking nervously round, saw the half-naked figure of a man, an exact counterpart of the deceased Dhondi, glide swiftly and noiselessly from behind, and spring on to the back seat of the dog-cart.

She was paralysed with fright. Her tongue, grown dry, clave to the roof of her mouth; she was unable to utter a word. Her husband, noticing the strange contortions in her face as she strove vainly to speak, said, "What on earth's the matter, Marion? Are you ill?"



"DRIVING HIS WIFE HOME IN A DOG-CART"

"No," she gasped hoarsely, the words seeming to choke her. "There is a terrible—something—on the seat behind us. I believe it is Dhondi's ghost. Oh, Maurice, I am so frightened, I feel I am going to faint."

"Nonsense, Marion," he laughed; "it's only some scoundrel playing a trick upon us. I'll leave a mark upon him by which to remember me." Saying which, and turning half round, he jobbed the handle of the whip with savage force into the face of the occupant of the back seat. There was no resistance. The blow passed through thin air, and a sardonic smile played over the ghastly features of the phantom.

The horse, meanwhile, had broken into a cold sweat, and was standing still,

quivering in every limb. Brazabon brought the whip smartly down on his quarters, whereupon the affrighted animal, rearing straight on end, pawed the air for a second or two, and then came down with his fore-feet on the parapet of the bridge. Mrs. Brazabon, hysterical with fright, clutched wildly at her husband, lost her balance, and was precipitated headlong into the dark, seething flood below. As she was falling, Brazabon heard a sepulchral voice that seemed to be floating in the air, repeating in sinister tones the weird refrain, "Three lives! Three lives!" The horse, regaining the ground, broke into a mad gallop and bolted wildly home. Brazabon had the greatest difficulty in retaining his seat, and when he was able to glance round, found that he was alone; the

ghostly visitant had disappeared.

Brazabon's friends endeavoured to persuade him to send his little motherless child to England, but he declined to follow their advice, haunted with a superstitious dread that some harm might befall his darling if separated from him. He therefore invited one of his sisters to come and keep house for him in India, and take care of Bella. As time went by, Bella, with a child's blessed facility for banishing sad memories, recovered her spirits and became as happy and bright as ever, though she sometimes asked wonderingly why her mother had never returned from Kirkee.

One evening, the child, after returning from a walk with her ayah, said to her father, "Daddy dear, I met that horrible old woman Ramabhai on the road. She looked at me so strangely, and said, 'Three lives! Three lives! Your turn next, Missy Baba.' I was afraid she would catch me and carry me off. But the ayah threatened to call a policeman, and then Ramabhai ran away."

Brazabon took Bella on to his knee, and, stroking her curls caressingly, pacified her with the assurance that the old woman was quite silly, and did not know what she was saying. He was nevertheless seized with a foreboding of impending evil, which made his blood run cold. What if the old woman's words were to come true, and his darling were to be taken from him! What would he have left to live for?

The hot weather had set in, and there had been some cases of small-pox among the natives in the bazaar; but, as the complaint was usual at that time of year, the Europeans paid little heed to it. Captain and Miss Brazabon, however, decided to take Bella to Mahableshwur, and thus guard against all possible chance of infection. The evening before their departure, brother and sister went to a dinner party, leaving the ayah in charge of the child, with strict injunctions to remain in the nursery during their absence. On their return home, Miss Brazabon went to the nursery and found the ayah stretched, to all appearance, fast asleep on a mat across the doorway. She tried to rouse her, spoke to her, shook her; but the woman, though breathing heavily, gave no further sign of consciousness. Miss Brazabon, believing that the ayah was drunk, turned away with a gesture of disgust, and walked towards the child's cot. She saw to her surprise, in the dim light, two little faces reposing side by side on the pillow; one, plump and rosy, framed in a tangle of clustering brown curls; the other, black, drawn, emaciated, the closely shaven crown of the head covered with white, running sores. With an exclamation of horror, she lifted the coverlet, and beheld, nestled up against Bella, the naked corpse of a native child, covered with

gaping ulcers. Her scream of terror brought the whole household running into the room. Taking her brother by the arm, she pointed silently to the two figures lying on the bed. One of the servants, grasping the situation, wrapped a sheet round the body of the dead child and carried it from the room. Bella, meanwhile, continued to sleep placidly, in blissful unconsciousness of the drama that had been enacted. She was under the influence of a drug.

The mystery was never cleared up. The ayah, on waking from her profound slumber, several hours later, protested that she knew nothing of what had occurred, that she had touched no liquor or intoxicating drugs; and she vowed that she had been bewitched. It was "*Shaitan ka kam*" (Devil's handiwork); there was no other possible explanation. The only clue, slight as it was, was found in the testimony of the Chokedar (night watchman), who deposed that old Ramabhai used frequently to wander about the compound at night, calling for her son, and invoking the Hindoo gods to avenge his death. The natives of India reverence mad people; and the Chokedar admitted that, believing Ramabhai to be insane and harmless, he had not interfered with the old woman, who, so far as he knew, had never entered the house.

A few days after the Brazabons arrived at Mahableshwur, little Bella sickened of the loathsome disease, and speedily succumbed to it. Miss Brazabon was too ill herself to attend the funeral, and Captain Brazabon was the only mourner present at the burial service. After the Chaplain had departed, Brazabon stood with bared head, in the deepening gloom, gazing with anguish-stricken face into the yawning grave that contained the last remains of his beloved child.

"The sins of the father have been visited upon an innocent child. How gladly would I have sacrificed my own life in expiation of my cruelty, could only my darling Bella have been spared," groaned the miserable man.

As he finished speaking, he lifted his eyes from the grave, and there, on the opposite brink, almost touching him,

stood the spectral form of a man, naked to the waist, whose body was covered with deep, livid weals.

Brazabon clasped his hands over his eyes to shut out the horrible vision; but the stern, accusing voice, sounding like a requiem in his ears, repeated the now familiar refrain, "Three lives! Three lives!" When he lowered his hands he was alone with the dead.

* * * *

The miserable man now knew that there was a curse upon his life, and that the prophecy of Ramabhai was being fulfilled. Two lives had been taken already; the third would surely be his own. He felt that death in any shape would come as a welcome relief. He was haunted at all times, waking and sleeping, by the vision of his victim. He grew strangely gloomy and morose, developed signs of melancholia, and sought to drown care in drink. After returning to Poona, he met frequently on the roads the old woman, who, as soon as she caught sight of him, would run up to him and shriek in his ears her monotonous cry for vengeance.

At last Brazabon fell seriously ill, and was ordered to England, as the only chance of saving his life. The change of air and scene worked wonders. Away from his former surroundings, he rapidly regained health and strength, and became a new man; and, before a year had elapsed, had begun to believe that life was still worth living. The phantom of the murdered *syce* ceased to haunt him, and he succeeded in banishing from his thoughts that terrible episode of the past. Weary of his lonely existence, and pining for love and sympathy, he was fortunate enough to win the affection of a beautiful girl, who promised to be his wife. The day of their wedding had been fixed, when Brazabon suddenly received a telegram intimating that his regiment had been ordered on active service to the North-West Frontier of India, and that he must rejoin forthwith.

The morning of his departure, his betrothed, clinging fondly to him, said, "Oh, Maurice, I had such a terrible dream last night, which has made me feel quite nervous and frightened about

you. I dreamt that I was walking along a lonely road in India, when an old woman came up to me and shrieked some words in my ears, of which I could only make out the sound of your name. She stretched her skinny hands towards my throat, and I, spellbound by a deadly fascination, powerless to move or speak, felt as if I were about to be strangled. Then I awoke, trembling all over. The recollection of it makes me sick with apprehension. I have a presentiment that something terrible will happen. How I wish you were not leaving me, dearest."

Brazabon felt a shiver run through his frame. Life had become very dear to him. Though no coward, he dreaded the thought that he might never again look upon the sweet face of his beloved.

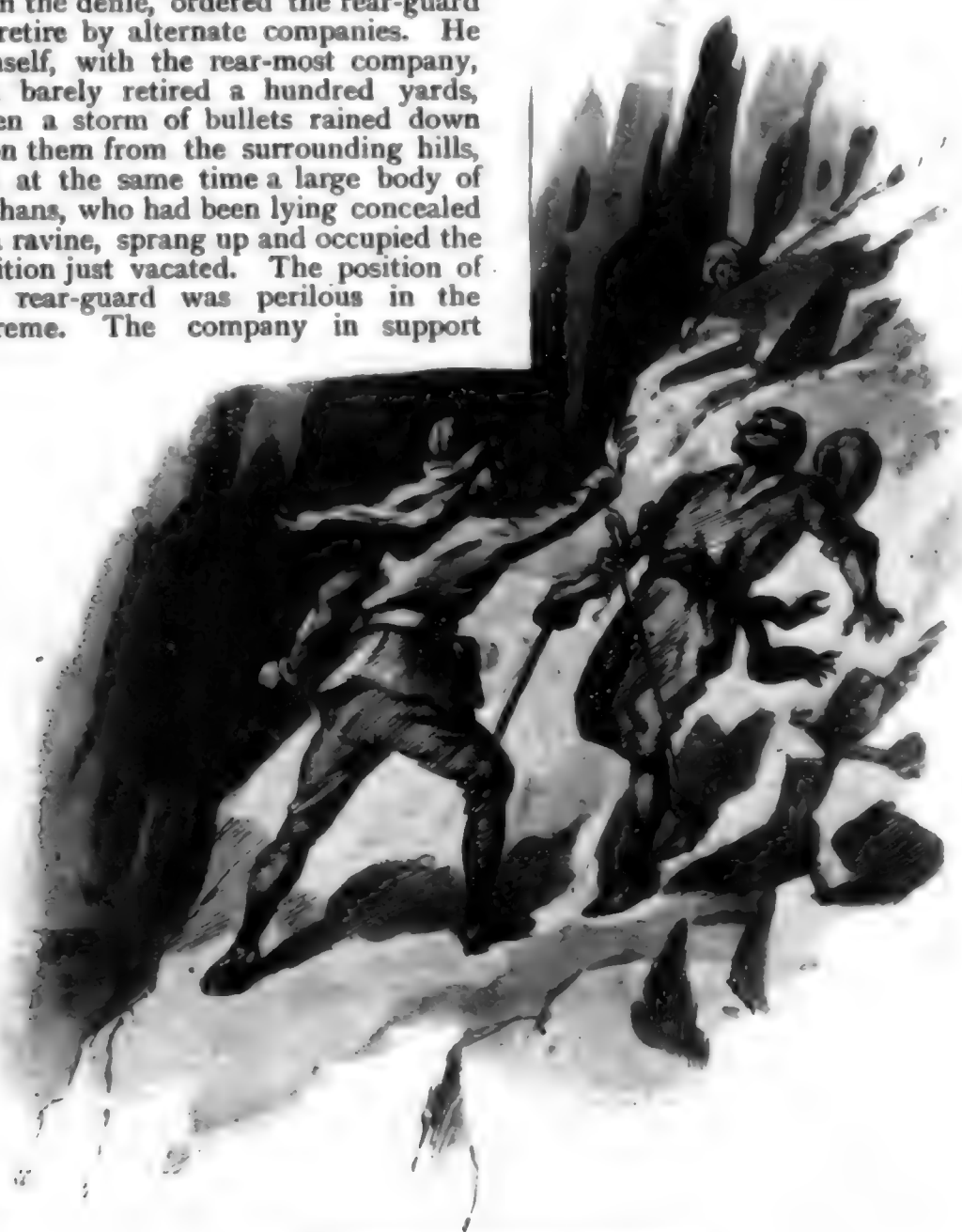
Taking her to his heart and kissing away her tears, he consoled her with brave words, adding, "The war will not last long, my darling, and we shall be married as soon as it is over. Perhaps I shall win a D.S.O.; won't you be proud of me then?"

* * * *

The incidents of that campaign are fresh in the memory of all: how the fierce hillmen, after a brave resistance, were subdued by the superior valour and discipline of their opponents. The recalcitrant tribesmen had tendered their submission, and the British forces had been ordered to withdraw from the area of operations. The return route to India lay through a patch of mountainous country occupied by a tribe which, although it had not avowed open hostility to the British, viewed their presence with sullen disapproval. The General in command of the Brigade, of which the Folkestone Fusiliers formed a part, elated with his success and blind to the danger signals which to a more experienced leader would have been obvious, laughed at the warnings of the Political Officer accompanying the Column, and declared that it was quite unnecessary to increase the strength of the rear-guard. Thus it befell that Captain Brazabon found himself detailed to cover the retirement of the Brigade, with two companies of his regiment—a force totally inadequate

for such an important duty. The proposed camping-ground for the night was a valley on the far side of a long, narrow defile. Before the main body of the troops reached the mouth of the defile, night had set in and the moon was high in the sky. Brazabon's detachment had meanwhile occupied a strong position among boulders, with the intention of holding it until their comrades should have cleared the gorge. Brazabon, on receiving intimation from the connecting files that the main body had debouched safely from the defile, ordered the rear-guard to retire by alternate companies. He himself, with the rear-most company, had barely retired a hundred yards, when a storm of bullets rained down upon them from the surrounding hills, and at the same time a large body of Pathans, who had been lying concealed in a ravine, sprang up and occupied the position just vacated. The position of the rear-guard was perilous in the extreme. The company in support

doubled up to the rescue of their comrades; but the main body was now so distant from the scene of action that no relief from that quarter could be expected. There was nothing for it but to die like men. The Pathans behind the boulders, reinforced by hundreds of their fellow-tribesmen, and emboldened by the small number of their opponents, rushed out in a mass to overwhelm the little band. A withering volley stretched several of them dead upon the ground; but the rest, carried onward by the

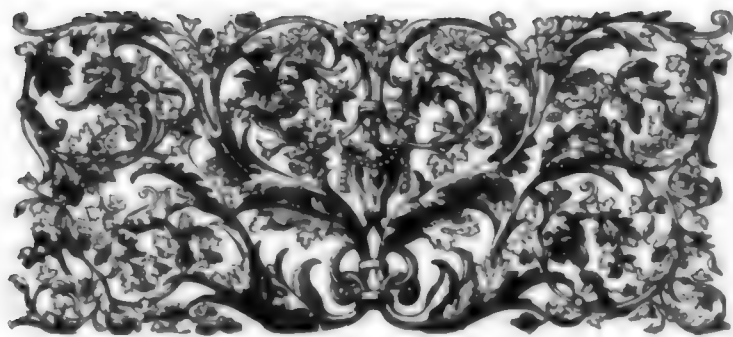


"THE GIANT STAGGERED BACKWARDS"

impetus of the rush, were soon in the midst of the British soldiers, when a fierce and bloody encounter between sword and bayonet ensued, in which quarter was neither asked nor given.

The British leader found himself engaged with a hairy giant of most ferocious aspect, who, whirling his broad-bladed tulwar round his head, to the accompaniment of the fierce Moslem war-cry, made savage slashes at his adversary. Brazabon, who was a good swordsman, parried the cuts of his formidable opponent, and then disabling him by a skilful thrust in the wrist, caused the weapon to fly from his hand. The giant staggered back-

wards, and Brazabon was about to run him through, when a lean, brown body, with livid weals showing clear in the moonlight, interposed itself between his sword-point and the breast of his foe. It was the phantom of the murdered *syc*. Brazabon reeled like a drunken man; the sword dropped from his nerveless grasp; ere he could recover himself, the Pathan, with an exultant shout of "*Allah Akhbar!*" had driven a dagger deep into his throat. While his life-blood was spurting forth in a warm, red gush, there sounded in his ears, for the last time, above the din of battle, the words of fatal import, "Three lives! Three lives!"





WRITTEN BY REGINALD BACCHUS AND RANGER GULL.

ILLUSTRATED BY LOUIS KIGHT

IN THREE EPISODES



FIRST EPISODE.

"**I**T is certainly a wonderful yarn," said Trant, "and excellent copy. My only regret is that I didn't think of it myself in the first instance."

"But, Tom, why shouldn't it be true? It's incredible enough for any one to believe. I'm sure I believe it, don't you, Guy?"

Guy Descaves laughed. "Perhaps, dear. I don't know and I don't much care, but I did a good little leaderette on it this morning. Have you done anything, Tom?"

"I did a whole buck middle an hour ago at very short notice. That's why I'm a little late. I had finished all my work for the night, and I was just washing my hands when Fleming came in with the make-up. We didn't expect

him at all to-night, and the paper certainly was rather dull. He'd been dining somewhere, and I think he was a little bit cocked. Anyhow he was nasty, and kept the presses back while I did a 'special' on some information he brought with him."

While he was talking, Beatrice Descaves, his *fiancée* began to lay the table for supper, and in a minute she called them to sit down. The room was very large, with cool white-papered walls, and the pictures, chiefly original black and white sketches, were all framed in *passe pas Tout* frames, which gave the place an air of serene but welcome simplicity. At one end of it was a great window which came almost to the floor, and in front of the window there was a low, cushioned seat. The night was very hot, and the window was wide open. It was late—nearly half-past one, and London was quite

silent. Indeed the only sound that they could hear was an occasional faint burst of song and the tinkling of a piano, which seemed to come from the neighbourhood of Fountain Court.

Guy Descaves was a writer, and he lived with his sister Beatrice in the Temple. Trant, who was also a journalist on the staff of a daily paper, and who was soon going to marry Beatrice, often came to them there after his work was done. The three young people lived very much together, and were very happy in a delightful unfettered way. The Temple was quiet and close to their work, and they found it in these summer days a most peaceful place when night had come to the town.

They were very gay at supper in the big, cool room. Trant was a clever young man and very much in love, and the presence of Beatrice always inspired him to talk. It was wonderful to sit by her, and to watch her radiant face, or to listen to the music of her laugh which rippled like water falling into water. Guy, who was more than thirty, and was sure that he was very old, liked to watch his sister and his friend together, and to call them "you children."

"What is the special information that the editor brought, dear?" Beatrice asked Trant, as soon as they were seated round the table.

"Well," he answered. "It seems that he managed to get hold of young Egerton Cotton, Professor Glazebrook's assistant, who is staying at the Metropole. Of course various rumours have got about from the crew of the ship, but nothing will be definitely known till the inquest to-morrow. Cotton's story is really too absurd, but Fleming insisted on its going in."

"Did he give him much for his information?" Descaves asked.

"Pretty stiff, I think. I know the *Courier* offered fifty, but he stuck out. Fleming only got it just at the last moment. It's silly nonsense, of course, but it'll send the sales up to-morrow."

"What is the whole thing exactly?" Beatrice asked. "All that I've heard is that Professor Glazebrook brought back some enormous bird from the Arctic, and that just off the Nore the thing escaped and killed him. I'm sure

that sounds quite sufficiently extraordinary for anything; but I suppose it's all a lie."

"Well," said Trant. "What Egerton Cotton says is the most extraordinary thing I have ever heard—it's simply laughable—but it will sell three hundred thousand extra copies. I'll tell you. I've got the whole thing fresh in my brain. You know that Professor Glazebrook was one of the biggest biologists who have ever lived, and he's been doing a great, tedious, monumental book on prehistoric animals, the mammoth and all that sort of thing that E. T. Reid draws in *Punch*. Some old scientific Johnny in Wales used to find all the money, and he fitted out the Professor's exploration ship, the "Henry Sandys, to go and find these mammoths and beasts which have got frozen up in the ice. Don't you remember about two years ago when they started from Tilbury? They got the Lord Mayor down, and a whole host of celebrities, to see them go. I was there reporting, I remember it well, and Reggie Lance did an awfully funny article about it, which he called 'The hunting of the Snark.' Well, Egerton Cotton tells Fleming—the man *must* be mad—that they found a whole lot of queer bears and things frozen up, but no very great find until well on into the second year, when they were turning to come back. Fleming says he's seen all the diaries and photographs and everything; they had a frightfully hard time. At last one day they came across a great block of ice, and inside it, looking as natural as you please, was a huge winged sort of dragon creature, as big as a cart horse. Fleming saw a photograph. I don't know how they faked it up, and he says it was the most horrid cruel sort of thing you ever dreamt of after lobster salad. It had big, heavy wings, and a beak like a parrot, little flabby paws all down its body like a caterpillar, and a great bare, pink, wrinkled belly. Oh, the most filthy-looking brute! They cut down the ice till it was some decent size, and they hauled the whole thing chock-a-block, like a prune in a jelly, into the hold. The ice was frightfully hard, and one of the chains of the donkey engine broke once, and the whole thing fell, but even then the block held firm. It took

them three weeks to get it on board. Well, they sailed away with their beastly Snark as jolly as sandboys, and Cotton says the Professor was nearly out of his mind with joy—used to talk and mumble to himself all day. They put the thing in a huge refrigerator like the ones the Australian mutton comes over in, and

and he could sit just outside the brilliant circle of light thrown by the tall shaded lamp. The other two listened motionless, and as he unfolded the grisly story, his voice coming to them out of the darkness became infinitely more dramatic and impressive.

"Well, Cotton says that this went on



"AT LAST ONE DAY THEY CAME ACROSS A GREAT BLOCK OF ICE"

Glazebrook used to turn on the electric lights and sit muffled up in furs watching his precious beast for hours."

He stopped for a moment to light a cigarette, noticing with amusement that Guy and Beatrice were becoming tremendously interested. He made Beatrice pour him out a great tankard of beer before he would go on, and he moved to the window-seat, where it was cooler,

for a long time. He had to do all the scientific work himself, writing up their journals and developing the photos, as the Professor was always mysteriously pottering about in the cellar place. At last, one day, Glazebrook came into the cabin at lunch or whatever they have, and said he was going to make a big experiment. He talked a lot of rot about toads and reptiles being impri-

soned for thousands of years in stones and ice, and then coming to life, and he said he was going to try and melt out the dragon and tickle it into life with a swingeing current from the dynamo. Cotton laughed at him, but it wasn't any good, and they set to work to thaw the creature out with braziers. When they got close to it Cotton said that the water from the ice, as it melted, got quite brown and *smelt*! It wasn't till they were within almost a few hours from the Channel—you remember they put into some place in Norway for coal—and steaming for London River as hard as they could go, that they got it clear.

"While they were fixing the wires from the dynamo room, Cotton hurt his ankle and had to go to his bunk for some hours to rest. He begged Glazebrook to wait till he could help, for he had become insensibly interested in the whole uncanny thing, but it was no use. He says the fellow was like a madman, red eyes with wrinkles forming up all round them, and so excited that he was almost foaming at the mouth. He went to his cabin frightfully tired, and very soon fell asleep. One of the men woke him up by shaking him. The man was in a blue funk and told him something dreadful had happened in the hold. Cotton hobbled up to the big hatchway, which was open, and as he came near it with the mate and several of the men, he said he could hear a coughing choked-up kind of noise, and that there was a stench-like ten thousand monkey houses. They looked in and saw this great beast *alive*! and squatting over Glazebrook's body picking out his inside like a bird with a dead crab."

Beatrice jumped up with a scream. "Oh Tom, Tom, don't, you horrid boy! I won't hear another word. I shan't sleep a wink. Ugh! how disgusting and ridiculous. Do you mean to tell me that you've actually gone to press with all that ghastly nonsense? I'm going to bathe my face, you've made me feel quite hot and sticky. You can tell the rest to Guy, and if you haven't done by the time I come back, I won't say good-night to you, there!"

She left the room, not a little disconcerted by the loathsome story which

Trant, forgetting his listeners, had been telling with the true journalist's passion for sensational detail. Guy knocked the ashes slowly out of his pipe. "Well?" he said.

"Oh, there isn't much more. He says they all ran away and watched from the companion steps, and presently the beast came flopping up on deck, with its beak all over blood, and its neck coughing and working. It got half across the hatchway and seemed dazed for about an hour. No one seemed to think of shooting it! Then Cotton says it crawled to the bulwarks coughing and grunting away, and after a few attempts actually flew up into the air. He said it flew unlike any creature he had ever seen, much higher than most birds fly, and very swiftly. The last they saw of it was a little thing like a crow hovering over the forts at Shoe'ness."

"Well, I'm damned," said Guy. "I never heard a better piece of yarning in my life. Do you actually mean to tell me that Fleming dares to print all that gaudy nonsense in the paper. He must certainly have been very drunk."

"Well, there it is, old man. I had to do what I was told, and I made a good piece of copy out of it. I am not responsible if Fleming does get his head laughed off, I don't edit his rag. Pass the beer."

"Is the ship here?"

"Yes it was docked about six this morning, and so far all the published news is what you had to-day in the *Evening Post*. It seems that something strange certainly did happen, though of course it wasn't that. They are going to hold an inquest, Fleming says. Something horribly beastly has happened to Glazebrook there's no doubt of that. Something has scooped the poor beggar out. Well, I must be going, it's nearly three, and more than a little towards dawning. Tell Bee I'm off, will you?"

Beatrice came back in a minute like a fresh rose, and before he went she drew him on to the balcony outside the window. There was a wonderful view from the balcony. Looking over the great lawns far down below, they could just see the dim purple dome of St. Paul's which seemed to be floating in

mist, its upper part stark and black against the sky. To the right was the silent river with innumerable patches of yellow light from the rows of gas lamps on Blackfriars bridge. A sweet scent from the boxes of mignonette floated on the dusky, heavy air. He put his arm round her and kissed her sweet, tremulous lips. "My love, my love," she whispered, "oh, I love you so!"

Her slender body clung to him. She was very sweet. The tall, strong young man leant over her and kissed her masses of dark, fragrant hair.

"My little girl, my little girl," he murmured with a wonderful tenderness in his voice, "there is nothing in the world but you, sweet little girl, dear, dear little girl, little wife."

She looked up at him at the word and there was a great light in her eyes, a thing inexpressibly beautiful for a man to see.

"Love, good-night," he whispered, and he kissed the tiny pink ear that heard him.

After the fantastic story he had been telling them, a story which, wild and grotesque as it was, had yet sufficient *vraisemblance* to make them feel uncomfortable, the majesty of the night gave the dim buildings of the town a restful and soothing effect, and as they stood on the balcony with their love surging over them, they forgot everything but that one glorious and radiant fact.

Beatrice went with him to the head of the staircase—They lived very high up in the buildings called "Temple Gardens"—and watched him as he descended. It was curious to look down the great well of the stone steps and to feel the hot air which rose up from the gas lamps beating on her face. She could only see Tom on each landing when he turned to look up at her—a



"THEY LOOKED IN AND SAW THE GREAT BEAST ALIVE"

tiny pink face perched on a little black fore-shortened body.

When he got right down to the bottom he shouted up a "good night," his voice sounding strange and unnatural as the walls threw it back to each other. In after years she always remembered the haunting sound of his voice as it came to her for the last time in this world.

Between seven and eight o'clock the next morning Guy, who was on the staff of the *Evening Post*, one of the leading lunch-time papers, left the Temple for the offices in the Strand.

It was a beautiful day, and early as it was the streets were full of people going to their work. Even now the streets were full of colour and sunshine, and every little city clerk contributed to the gayness of the scene by wearing round his straw hat the bright ribbon of some club to which he did not belong.

Guy had been working for about an hour when Gobion, his assistant—the young man who afterwards made such a success with his book “Penny Inventions,”—came in with a bunch of “flimsies,” reports of events sent in by penny-a-liners who scoured London on bicycles, hoping for crime.

“There doesn’t seem anything much,” he said, “except one thing which is probably a fake. It was brought in by that man, Roberts, and he tried to borrow half a James from the commissionaire on the strength of it, which certainly looks like a fake. If it is true, though, it’s good stuff. I’ve sent a reporter down to inquire.”

“What is it?” said Descaves, yawning.

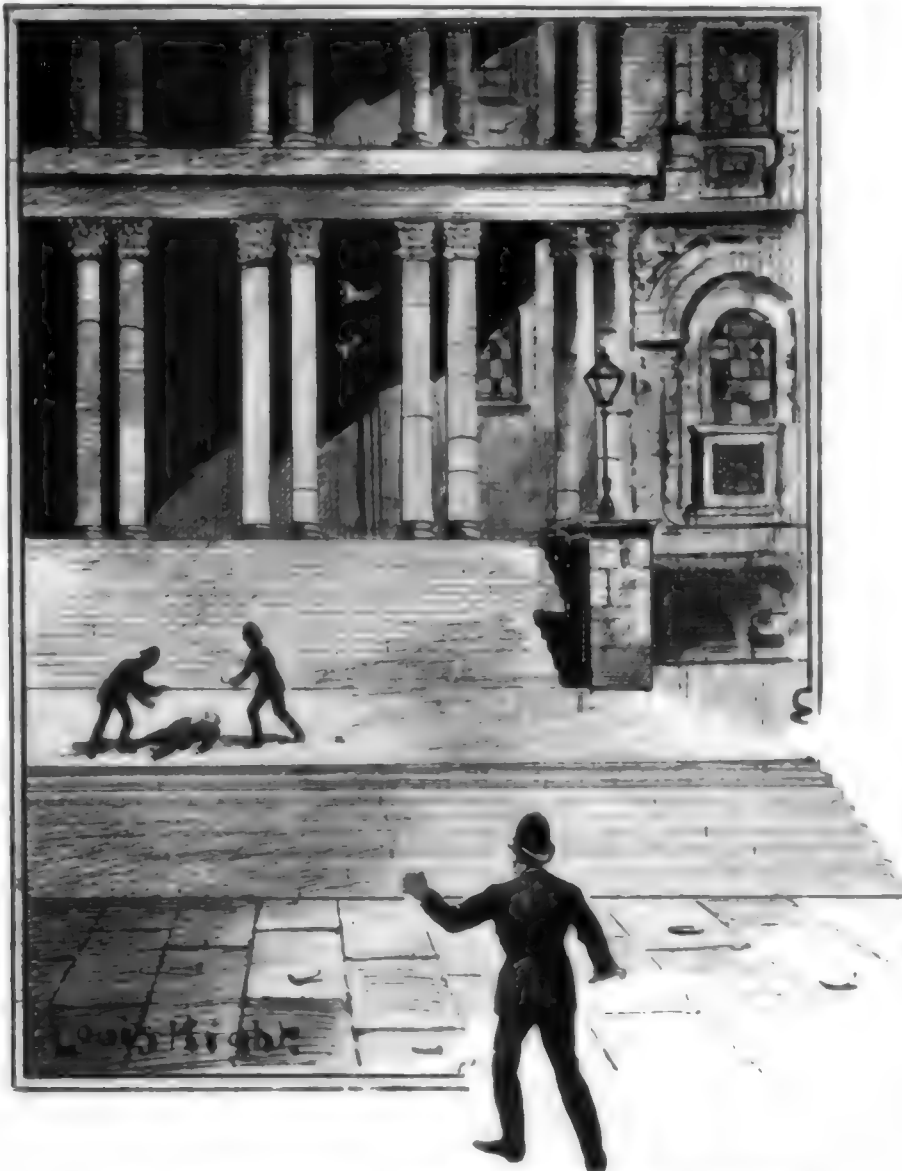
“Reported murder of a journalist. The flimsy says he was found at four o’clock in the morning by a policeman, on the steps of St. Paul’s absolutely broken up and mangled. Ah, here it is. *‘The body, which presented a most extraordinary and unaccountable appearance, was at once removed to St. Bride’s mortuary.’* Further details later, Roberts says.”

“It sounds all right; at any rate the reporter will be back soon, and we shall know. How did Roberts spot him as a journalist?”

“Don’t know, suppose he hadn’t shaved.”

While the youth was speaking, the reporter entered breathless.

“Column special,” he gasped.



“THE BODY WAS AT ONCE REMOVED TO ST. BRIDE’S MORTUARY”

"Trant, a man on the *Mercury*, has been murdered, cut all to pieces. Good God! I forgot, Descaves. Oh, I am fearfully sorry!"

Guy rose quickly from his seat with a very white face, but without any sound. As he did so by some strange coincidence the tape machine on the little pedestal behind him began to print the first words of a despatch from the Exchange Telegraph Company. The message dealt with the tragedy that had taken immediate power of speech away from him. The familiar whirr of the type wheel made him turn from mere force of habit, and stunned as his brain was, he saw the dreadful words spelling themselves on the paper with no realisation of their meaning. He stood swaying backwards and forwards, not knowing what he did, his eyes still resting on the broad sheet of white paper on which the little wheel sped ceaselessly, recording the dreadful thing in neat blue letters.

Then suddenly his eyes flashed the meaning of the gathering words to his brain, and he leant over the glass with a sick eagerness. Gobion and the reporter stood together anxiously watching him. At length the wheel slid along the bar and came to rest with a sharp click. Guy stood up again.

"Do my work to-day," he said quietly. "I must go to my sister," and taking his hat he left the room.

When he got out into the brilliant sunshine which flooded the Strand, his senses came back to him and he determined that obviously the first thing to be done was to make sure that the body at St. Bride's was really the body of his friend.

Even in moments of deep horror and sorrow the mind of a strong, self-contained man does not entirely lose its power of concentration. The Telegraphic news had left very little doubt in his mind that the fact was true, but at the same time he could not conceive how such a ghastly thing could possibly have happened. According to the information he had, it seemed the poor fellow had been struck dead only a few minutes after he had left the Temple the night before, and within a few yards of his chambers. "On the steps of St. Paul's" the wire ran, and

Trant's rooms were not sixty yards away, in a little old-fashioned court behind the Deanery.

It was incredible. Owing to the great shops and warehouses all round, the neighbourhood was patrolled by a large number of policemen and watchmen. The space at the top of Ludgate Hill was, he knew, brilliantly lighted by the street lamps, and besides, about four it was almost daylight. It seemed impossible that Tom could have been done to death like this. "It's a canard," he said to himself, "damned silly nonsense," but even as he tried to trick himself into disbelief, his sub-conscious brain told him unerringly that the horrid thing was true.

Five minutes later he walked out of the dead house knowing the worst. The horror of the thing he had just seen, the awful inexpressible horror of it, killed every other sensation. He had recognised his friend's right hand, for on the hand was a curious old ring of beaten gold which Beatrice used to wear.

SECOND EPISODE.

Mr. Frank Fleming, the editor of the *Daily Mercury*, was usually an early riser. He never stopped at the office of the paper very late unless some important news was expected, or unless he had heard something in the House that he wished to write about himself. Now and then, however, when there was an all-night sitting, he would steal away from his bench below the gangway and pay a surprise visit before Trant and his colleagues had put the paper to bed. On these occasions, when he was kept away from his couch longer than was his wont, he always slept late into the morning. It was about twelve o'clock on the day of Trant's death that he rose up in bed and pressed the bell for his servant. The man brought his shaving water and the morning's copy of the *Mercury*, and retired. Fleming opened his paper and the black headline and leaded type of the article on Professor Glazebrook's death at once caught his eye. He read it with complacent satisfaction. Trant had done the thing very cleverly and the article was certainly most striking. Fleming, a shrewd man of the world and Parliamentary adventurer, had not for a moment dreamt

of believing young Egerton Cotton, but he nevertheless knew his business. It had got about that there was something mysterious in the events that had occurred on board the "Henry Sandys," and it had also got about that the one man who could throw any authentic light on these events was Cotton. It was therefore the obvious policy to buy Cotton's information, and, while disclaiming any responsibility for his statements, to steal a march on his contemporaries by being the first to publish them. As he walked into the pretty little dining-room of his flat, Mr. Fleming was in an excellent temper.

He was dividing his attention between the kidneys and the *Times*, when his man came into the room and told him that Mr. Morgan, the news editor, must see him immediately.

He could hear Morgan in the *entresol*, and he called out cheerily, "Come in, Morgan; come in, you're just in time for some breakfast."

The news editor entered in a very agitated state. When Fleming heard the undoubted fact of Trant's death he was genuinely moved, and Morgan, who had a very low opinion of his chief's human impulses, was surprised and pleased. It seemed that Morgan had neither seen the body nor been to the scene of the crime, but had simply got his news from some men in the bar of the "Cheshire Cheese," in Fleet Street, who were discussing the event. Trant had been a very popular man among his brethren, and many men were mourning for him as they went about their work.

"What you must do," said Fleming to his assistant, "is this. Go down to the mortuary on my behalf, explain who Trant was, and gain every morsel of information you can. Go to the place where the body was found as well. Poor Tom Trant! He was a nice boy—a nice boy; he had a career before him. I shall walk down to the office. This has shaken me very much, and I think a walk will buck me up a little. If you get a fast cab and tell the man to go Hell for Leather, you will be back in Fleet Street by the time I arrive. I shall not walk fast." He heaved a perfectly sincere sigh as he put on his gloves. As he left the mansions and walked past the

Aquarium he remembered that a cigar was a soothing thing; and, lighting one, he enjoyed it to the full. The sunshine was so radiant that it was indeed difficult to withstand its influence. Palace Yard was a great sight, and all the gilding on the clock tower shone merrily. The pigeons, with their strange iridescent eyes, were sunning themselves on the hot stones. The editor forgot all about Trant for some minutes in the pure physical exhilaration of it all. As he advanced up Parliament Street he saw Lord Salisbury, who was wearing an overcoat, despite the heat.

Fleming turned up Whitehall Court and past the National Liberal Club to the Strand, which was very full of people. Fleming had always been a great patron of the stage. He knew, and was known to, many actors and actresses, and you would always see his name after a ten-guinea subscription on a benefit list. He liked the Strand, and he walked very slowly down the north side, nodding or speaking to some theatrical acquaintance every moment.

When he came to the bar where all the actors go, which is nearly opposite the Tivoli Music Hall, he saw Rustle Tapper, the famous comedian, standing on the steps wearing a new white hat and surveying the bright and animated scene with intense enjoyment.

The two men were friends, and for a minute or two Fleming mounted the steps and stood by the other's side. It was now about half-past one.

"Well," said the actor, "and how are politics, very busy just now? What is this I see in the *Pall Mall* about the murder of one of your young men? It's not true, I hope."

"I am afraid it is only too true. He was the cleverest young fellow I have ever had on the paper. I got him straight from Baliol, and he would have been a very distinguished man. I don't know anything about it yet but just the bare facts; our news editor has gone down to find out all he can."

They moved through the swing doors into the bar, talking as they went.

The Strand was full of all its regular frequenters, and in the peculiar fashion of this street every one seemed to know every one else intimately. Little groups

of more or less well-known actors and journalists stood about the pavement or went noisily in and out of the bars, much impeding the progress of the ordinary passer-by. There was no sign or trace of anything out of the common to be seen. It was just the Strand on a bright summer's day, and the flower-girls

shouting together, but whether in alarm or whether at the passing of some great person was not immediately apparent.

It was obvious that something of importance was happening not very far away. After about a minute the shouting became very loud indeed, and a shrill note of alarm was plainly discernible.



"IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT SOMETHING OF IMPORTANCE WAS HAPPENING"

were selling all their roses very fast to the pretty burlesque actresses and chorus girls who were going to and fro from the agents' offices.

About two o'clock—the evening papers said half-past two, but their information was faulty—the people in Bedford Street and the Strand heard a great noise of shouting, which, as far as they could judge, came from the direction of the Haymarket or Trafalgar Square. The noise sounded as if a crowd of people were

In a few seconds the pavements were crowded with men, who came running out from the bars and restaurants to see what was happening. Many of them came out without their hats. Fleming and the actor hurried out with the rest, straining and pushing to get a clear view westwards. One tall, clean-shaven man, with a black patch on his eye, his face bearing obvious traces of grease paint, came out of the Bun Shop with his glass of brandy and water still in his hand.

It was a curious sight. Everyone was looking towards Trafalgar Square with mingled interest and uncertainty, and for the time all the business of the street was entirely suspended. The drivers of the omnibuses evidently thought that the shouting came from fire-engines which were trying to force their way eastwards through the traffic, for they drew up by the curbstone, momentarily expecting that the glistening helmets would swing round the corner of King William Street.

Fleming, from the raised platform at the door of Gatti's, could see right down past Charing Cross station, and as he was nearly six feet high, he could look well over the heads of the podgy little comedians who surrounded him. Suddenly the noise grew in volume and rose several notes higher, and a black mass of people appeared running towards them.

The next incident happened so rapidly that before any one had time for realisation it was over. A huge black shadow sped along the dusty road, and, looking up, the terror-stricken crowd saw the incredible sight of a vast winged creature, as large as a dray-horse, gliding slowly over the street. The monster, which Fleming describes as something like an enormous bat with a curved bill like a bird of prey, began to hover, as if preparing to descend, when there was the sudden report of a gun. An assistant at the hosier's shop at the corner of Southampton Street, who belonged to the Volunteers, happened to be going to do some range firing in the afternoon, and fetching his rifle from behind the counter, took a pot shot at the thing. His aim, from surprise and fear, was bad, and the bullet only chipped a piece of stone from the coping of the Tivoli. The shot, however, made the creature change its intentions, for it swerved suddenly to the right against some telegraph wires, and then, breaking through them, flew with extraordinary swiftness away over the river, making, it appeared, for the Crystal Palace upon Sydenham Hill. A constable on Hungerford foot-bridge, who saw it as it went over the water, said that its hairless belly was all cut and bleeding from the impact of the wires. The excitement in the Strand became frantic. The windows of all the shops round the

Tivoli were broken by the pressure of the crowd, who had instinctively got as near as possible to the houses. The cab and omnibus horses, scenting the thing, were in that state of extreme terror which generally only an elephant has power to induce in them. The whole street was in terrible confusion. The only person who seemed calm, so a report ran in a smart evening paper, was a tall man who was standing at the door of a bar wearing a patch over one eye, and who had a glass of brandy in his hand. A reporter who had been near him, said that as soon as the monster had disappeared over the house-tops, he quietly finished his glass of brandy, and straightway went inside to have it replenished.

Special editions of the evening papers were at once issued. The *Globe*, owing to the nearness of its offices, being first in the field.

The sensational story of the *Mercury*, which had been the signal for increasing laughter all the morning, came at once into men's minds, and, incredible as it was, there could now be no doubt of the truth.

A creature which, in those dim ages when the world was young and humanity itself was slowly being evolved in obedience to an inevitable law, had winged its way over the mighty swamps and forests of the primeval world, was alive and preying among them. To those who thought, there was something sinister in such an incalculable age. The order of nature was disturbed.

The death of young Trant was immediately explained, and at dinner time the wildest rumours were going about the clubs, while in the theatres and music-halls people were saying that a whole foul brood of dragons had been let loose upon the town.

The sensation was unique. Never before in all the history of the world had such a thing been heard of, and all night long the telegraphs sent conflicting rumours to the great centres of the earth. London was beside itself with excitement, and few people going about in the streets that night felt over secure, though everyone felt that the slaughter of the beast was only a matter of hours. The very uneasiness that such a weird and unnatural appearance excited in the

brains of the populace had its humorous side, and when that evening Mr. Dan Leno chose to appear upon the stage as a comic St. George, the laughter was Homeric. Such was the state of the public opinion about the affair on the evening of the first day, but there was a good deal of anxiety felt at Scotland Yard, and Sir Edward Bradford was for some time at work organising and directing precautionary measures. A company of sharpshooters was sent down to the Embankment from the Regent's Park Barrack, and waited in readiness for any news. Mounted police armed with carbines were patrolling the whole country round Sydenham, and even as far as Mitcham Common were on the alert. Two or three of them rode constantly up and down the Golf Links.

A warning wire was despatched to Mr. Henry Gillman, the general manager of the Crystal Palace, for at this season of the year the grounds were always full of pleasure-seekers. About nine o'clock the chief inspector on duty at the police headquarters received the following telegram.

"Animal appeared here 8.30, and unfortunately killed child. Despite volley got away apparently unharmed. Heading for London when last seen. Have closed Palace and cleared grounds."

It appears what actually happened was as follows :—

A Dr. David Pryce, a retired professor from one of the Scotch Universities, who lived in a house on Gipsy Hill, was taking a stroll down the central transept after dinner, when he was startled to hear the noise of breaking glass high up in the roof. Some large pieces of glass fell within a few yards of him into one of the ornamental fountains. Running to one side, he looked up, and saw that some heavy body had fallen on to the roof and coming through the glass was so balanced upon an iron girder. Even as he looked, the object broke away and fell with a frightful splash into the basin among the gold-fish. Simultaneously he heard the crack of rifles firing in the grounds outside.

He was the first of the people round to run to the fountain, where he found, to his unspeakable horror, the bleeding

body of a child, a sweet little girl of six, still almost breathing.

The news of this second victim was in the streets about ten o'clock, and it was then that a real panic took possession of all the pleasure-seekers in Piccadilly and the Strand.

The special descriptive writers from the great daily papers, who went about the principal centres of amusement, witnessed the most extraordinary sights. Now and again there would be a false alarm that the dragon—for that is what people were beginning to call it—was in the neighbourhood, and there would be a stampede of men and women into the nearest place of shelter. The proprietor of one of the big Strand bars, afterwards boasted that the panic had been worth an extra fifty pounds to him.

The Commissioner of Police became so seriously alarmed, both at the disorderly state of the streets, and the possible chance of another fatality, that he thought it wiser to obtain military assistance, and about half-past eleven London was practically under arms. Two or three linesmen were stationed at central points in the main streets, and little groups of cavalry with unslung carbines patrolled from place to place.

Although the strictest watch was kept all night, nothing was seen of the monster, but in the morning a constable of the C Division, detailed for special duty, found traces at the top of Ludgate Hill which proved conclusively that the animal had been there sometime during the night.

THE THIRD EPISODE

The wide-spread news that the terror had been in the very heart of London during the night created tremendous excitement among the authorities and the public at large. The City Police held a hurried consultation in Old Jewry about nine o'clock in the morning, and after hearing Sergeant Weatherley's account of his discovery, came to the conclusion that the dragon had probably made its lair on the top of St. Paul's Cathedral.

A man was at once sent round to the Deanery for a pass which should allow a force of police to search the roofs, and came back in half an hour with an order written by Dean Gregory himself.

requesting the officials to give the police every facility for a thorough examination.

It was then that the fatal mistake was made which added a fourth victim to the death roll.

About 9.30 a telegram was received at New Scotland Yard from a professional golfer at Mitcham, saying that some caddies on their way to the club-house had sighted the monster hovering over the Croydon road early in the morning. A wire was at once despatched to the local police station on the lower green, directing that strict inquiries should be made, and the result telegraphed at once. Meanwhile Scotland Yard communicated with Old Jewry, and the City Police made the incredible blunder of putting off the search party till the Mitcham report was thoroughly investigated.

It was not allowed to be known that the police had any suspicion that St. Paul's might harbour the dragon, and the fact of Sergeant Weatherley's discovery did not transpire till the second edition of the *Star* appeared, just about the time the final scene was being enacted on the south roof.

Accordingly the omnibuses followed the usual Cannon Street route, and the City men from the suburbs crowded them as usual. In the brilliant morning sunshine—for it was a perfect summer's day—it was extremely difficult to believe that anything untoward was afoot.

The panic of the night before, the panic of the gas lamps and the uncertain mystery of night, had very largely subsided. Many a city man who the night before had come out of the Alhambra or the Empire seized with a genuine terror, now sat on the top of his City 'bus smoking the after-breakfast cigarette and almost joking about the whole extraordinary affair. The fresh, new air was so delightful that it had its effect on everybody, and the police and soldiers who stood at ease round the statue of Queen Anne were saluted with a constant fire of chaff from the waggish young gentlemen of the Stock Exchange as they were carried to their daily work.

"What price the Dragon!" and "Have you got a muzzle handy!" resounded in the precincts of the Cathed-

ral, and the merry witticisms afforded intense enjoyment to the crowds of ragamuffins who lounged round the top of Ludgate Hill.

Then, quite suddenly, came the last act of the terrible drama.

Just as a white Putney 'bus was slowly coming up the steep gradient of the hill, the horses straining and slipping on the road, a black object rose from behind the clock tower on the façade of the Cathedral, and with a long, easy dive the creature that was terrorising London came down upon the vehicle. It seemed to slide rapidly down the air with its wings poised and open, and it came straight at the omnibus. The driver, with great presence of mind and not a moment too soon, pulled his horses suddenly to the right, and the giant enemy rushed past with a great disturbance of the air hardly a yard away from the conveyance.

It sailed nearly down to the railway bridge before it was able to check its flight and turn.

Then, with a slow flapping of its great leathery wings, it came back to where the omnibus was oscillating violently as the horses reared and plunged.

It was the most horrible sight in the world. Seen at close quarters the monstrous creature was indescribably loathsome, and the stench from its body was overpowering. Its great horny beak was covered with brown stains, and in its eagerness and anger it was foaming and slobbering at the mouth. Its eyes, which were half-covered with a white scurf, had something of that malignant and horrible expression that one sometimes sees in the eyes of an evil-minded old man.

In a moment the thing was right over the omnibus, and the people on the top were hidden from view by the beating of its mighty wings. Three soldiers on the pavement in front of the Cathedral knelt down, and taking deliberate aim, fired almost simultaneously. A moment after the shots rang out, the horses, who had been squealing in an ecstasy of terror, overturned the vehicle. The dragon, which had been hit in the leather-like integument stretched between the rib-bones of its left wing, rose heavily and slowly, taking a little spring from

the side of the omnibus, and giving utterance to a rapid choking sound, very like the gobbling of a turkey. Its wings beat the air with tremendous power, and with the regular sound of a pumping engine, and in its bill it held some bright red object, which was screaming in uncontrollable agony. In two seconds the creature had mounted above the houses, and all down Ludgate

Hill the horror-bitten crowd could see that its writhing, screaming burden was a soldier of the line.

The man, by some curious instinct, had kept tight hold of his little swagger-stick, and his whirling arms bore a grotesque resemblance to the conductor of an orchestra directing its movements with his bâton. Some more shots pealed out, and the screaming stopped with the



Louis Rhead.

"IN ITS BILL IT HELD SOME BRIGHT RED OBJECT."

suddenness of a steam whistle turned off, while the swagger-stick fell down into the street.

Over the road, from house to house, was stretched a row of flags with a Union Jack in the centre, which had been put up earlier in the morning by an alderman who owned one of the shops, in order to signalise some important civic function. In mounting, the monster was caught by the line which supported the flags, and then with a tremendous effort it pulled the whole arrangement loose. Then, very slowly, and with the long row of gaudy flags streaming behind it, it rose high into the air and sank down behind the dome of St. Paul's. As it soared, regardless of the fusillade from below, it looked exactly like a fantastic Japanese kite. The whole affair, from the time of the first swoop from St. Paul's until the monster sank again to its refuge, only took two or three seconds over the minute.

The news of this fresh and terrible disaster reached the waiting party in Old Jewry almost immediately, and they started for the Cathedral without a moment's delay. They found Ludgate Hill was almost empty, as the police under the railway bridge were deflecting the traffic into other routes. On each side of the street hundreds of white faces peered from doorways and windows towards St. Paul's. The overturned omnibus still lay in the middle of the road, but the horses had been taken away.

The party marched in through the west door, and the ineffable peace of the great church fell round them like a cloak and made their business seem fantastic and unreal. Mr. Harding, the permanent clerk of the works, met them in the nave, and held a consultation with Lieutenant Boyle and Inspector Nicholson, who commanded the men. The clerk of the works produced a rough map of the various roofs, on any one of which the dragon might be. He suggested, and the lieutenant quite agreed, that two or three men should first be sent to try and locate the exact resting-place of the monster, and that afterwards the best shots should surround and attack it. The presence of a large number of men wandering about the extremely complicated system of approaches might well

disturb the creature and send it abroad again. He himself, he added, would accompany the scouts.

Three men were chosen for the job, a sergeant of police and two soldiers. Mr. Harding took them into his office, and they removed their boots for greater convenience in climbing. They were conducted first of all into the low gallery hung with old frescoes which leads to the library, and then, opening a small door in the wall, Mr. Harding, beckoning the others to follow, disappeared into darkness.

They ascended some narrow winding steps deep in the thickness of the masonry, until a gleam of light showed stealing down from above, making their faces pale and haggard. Their leader stopped, and there was a jingling of keys. "It is unlikely it'll be here," he said in a low voice, "and anyway it can't get at us quickly, but be careful. Sergeant, you bring one man and come with me, and the last man stay behind and hold the door open in case we have to retreat." He turned the key in the lock and opened the narrow door.

For a moment the brilliant light of the sun blinded them, and then the two men who were yet a few steps down in the dark heard the other say, "Come on, it's all safe."

They came out into a large square court floored with lead. Great stone walls rose all around them, and the only outlet was the door by which they had come. It was exactly like a prison exercise yard, and towering away above their heads in front was the huge central dome. The dismal place was quite empty.

"The swine isn't here, that's certain," said one of the soldiers.

"No, we must go round to the south side," said the clerk of the works; "it's very much like this, only larger. But there's a better way to get to it. Let us go back at once."

They went down again to the library corridor, and turning by the archway debouching on the whispering gallery—they could hear the strains of the organ as they passed—went up another dark and narrow stairway. They came out onto a small ledge of stone, a kind of gutter, and there was very little room between the walls at their backs and

the steep lead-covered side of the main roof which towered into the air straight in front.

"Now," said Mr. Harding, "we have got to climb up this slant and down the other side, and if he's anywhere about we shall see him there. At the bottom of the other slope is a gutter, like this, to stand in, but no wall, as it looks straight down into a big bear pit, like the one we went to first. We shall have to go right down the other slant, because if he's lying on the near side of the pit—and it's the shady side—we shan't be able to see him at all. You'll find it easy enough to get up, and if you should slip back this wall will bring you up short, but be very careful about going down. If you once begin to slide you'll toboggan right over the edge and on to the top of the beast, and even if he isn't there, it's a sixty foot drop."

As they climbed slowly up the steep roof, all London came into clear and lovely view—white, red, and purple in the sun. When at length they reached the top and clung there, for a moment, high in the air, like sparrows perching on the ridge of a house, they could only just see the mouth of the drop yawning down below them.

One of the soldiers, a lithe and athletic young fellow, was down at the bottom considerably before the others, and crouching in the broad gutter, he peered cautiously over the edge. They saw his shoulders heave with excitement, and in a moment he turned his head towards them. His face was white and his eyes

full of loathing. They joined him at once, and the horror of what they saw will never leave any of the four.

The Dragon was lying on its side against the wall. Its whole vast length was heaving as if in pain, while close by it lay the remains of what was once a soldier of the Queen.

It was soon killed. The marksmen were hurriedly brought up from below, and after a perilous climb, owing to the weight of their rifles, lined the edge of the pit. They fired repeated volleys into the vast groaning creature. After the first volley it began to cough and choke, and vainly trying to open its maimed wings, dragged itself into the centre of the place. The mere sight of the malign thing gave a shock to the experience that was indescribable. It fulfilled no place in the order of life, and this fact induced a cold fear far more than its actual appearance. A psychologist who talked to one of the soldiers afterwards, got near to some fundamental truths dealing with the natural limits of sensation, in a brilliant article published in *Cosmopolis*. In its death agonies, agonies which were awful to look at, it crawled right across the floor of the court, and it moved the line of flags, which still remained fixed to one paw, in such a way that when they got down to it they found that, by a strange and pathetic coincidence, the Union Jack was covering the body of the dead soldier.

In this way the oldest living thing in the world was destroyed, and London breathed freely again.





BY W. B. WALLACE, B.A.

ILLUSTRATED BY M. YORK SHUTER



I.

THE AMERICAN'S LEGACY



MAN lay sick unto death in the ward of a Liverpool hospital.

He was old, and yet men older than he have often presided over the destinies of mighty empires with unimpaired vitality, and intellectual faculties sobered and chastened, rather than diminished, by the advancing years. This, however, was a case of decay and collapse of the bodily powers, accelerated by the life of ceaseless activity which the man had led. He had simply used up his physical capital in a career of hardship and adventure, which, far from bringing grist to his mill, had landed him, at the end of his days, a pauper in the charity ward of an English hospital.

Edward Clayton was an American—a New Englander, hailing from the "Lumber State," and a bold, restless spirit, as so many of his countrymen are. He often boasted—and it was in his case no mere "tall talk"—that he had visited

every corner of North and South America. "A pretty large order, I guess," he would usually add, projecting a small cascade of tobacco-juice to the farthest end of the apartment. Most of his time, however, had been spent in Peru, including the territory once called Upper Peru, but now known as Bolivia.

The ancient looked picturesque enough now, as he reclined in his neat and comfortable bed, with its counterpane of clean, white dimity. The approach of death had softened the asperities of his rugged features, and increased the brilliance of his keen, dark eyes, contrasting so strangely with the leonine shock of hair above them, white as a snowdrift. He did not suffer, and the mental obfuscation, incidental to the earlier stages of his malady, had been dispersed by the radiance that so often heralds the rise of the Sun of Eternity.

"How do you feel this evening, Edward?" enquired a cheery voice.

"The old hulk is nearing its moorings at last," replied Clayton calmly.

Young Mr. Langford, the house-surgeon, tried to assume a reassuring air, but he was too honest to contradict his patient, who, he knew, was, as he had said, rapidly drifting towards the last moorings.

"I am glad you have come, sir," went on the old man in a wonderfully clear and strong voice, and with a wistful, eager expression in his eyes. "You are the best and kindest Britisher I ever met; and, as I am alone in the world, I should like to make you my residuary legatee."

An involuntary, but not unfeeling smile broke over the young surgeon's

latter, although exceeding sceptical as to its value, felt bound, under the circumstances, to accept it, and to thank the donor.

"Sit down, sir," said the American gravely. "I have a long story to tell, and it must be told before the expiring candle gives its last leap in the socket. Without an explanation the papers which you hold would be well-nigh valueless.

"You know—for I have often alluded to the fact in our conversations—that a good bit of my life was spent in Peru; but I have never yet told you my reasons for knocking about in that particular



"AN INVOLUNTARY, BUT NOT UNFEELING SMILE BROKE OVER THE YOUNG SURGEON'S FACE"

face, although he tried hard to check it.

"Yes, sir," continued the American in swift reply to his unuttered thought, "I know that I am a pauper; and yet I hold the key to a treasure greater than any monarch has ever accumulated. Here it is. It is yours; and may the blessing of a dying man, whose last hours you have soothed, enable you to use it aright, and with better success than I did."

Clayton handed Mr. Langford a small roll of papers, neatly tied up, which he drew from beneath his pillow. The

location. You are a better scholar than I, and no doubt have read about Atabalipa, the last of the Incas, and how Pizarro and D'Almagro—who, in the first instance, had no right to invade his country—picked a quarrel with him because, forsooth, he would not embrace Christianity at once, and surrender his dominions to the Emperor Charles V. No, the Spaniards did not show up particularly well on that occasion, and I don't think they could have expected better luck than they have had ever since. The wretched Peruvians were slaughtered like sheep; their Inca was

made a prisoner; and the land was plundered of all that was valuable and holy. This was not enough for the Dons. They had a kinder suspicion that Atabalipa was playing 'possum with them, and had not told them of all his treasures. Atabalipa maintained that he had; and the result of this difference of opinion was that the unfortunate Inca underwent a mock trial, was, of course, condemned, and then strangled at a stake.

"Vengeance overtook his murderers soon after; for the Spanish invaders quarrelled over their ill-gotten gains, and D'Almagro was conquered and slain by Pizarro, who was subsequently assassinated by some of his rival's followers. One would have fancied that the avarice of the new masters of Mexico and Peru would have been glutted by the enormous hoards of gold, silver and gems, which fell into their hands. It was not so; they had somehow taken it into their heads that there were far greater riches, far more astounding wonders hidden away, if only they could discover them. Many believed that Atabalipa had lied when he declared that he had revealed all his wealth to the Spaniards; and wild legends, such as those of Eldorado and the Floridan Fountain of Youth, rapidly gained currency.

"Now, I always fancied that the Dons had an inkling of the truth after all, and that the noble and patriotic Atabalipa had very pardonably outwitted his savage executioners. He must have had, I argued, what is called in trapper parlance a cache—perhaps in one of the islands of Lake Titicaca, where Manco Capac lived and reigned; perhaps near Cuzco, the ancient capital of the Peruvian Empire; perhaps in some secret spot in the heart of the Cordilleras.

"Such were the airy foundations upon which I built my theory—a superstition, a legend, a guess. To proving the truth of this theory I devoted some of the best years of my life. I penetrated every nook and inlet of Lake Titicaca; I lay down and slept in the mystic isle of Manco Capac, and sought in my dreams to commune with the shade of the great Peruvian; with rifle and haversack, and attended by a small

party of Indian guides, I wandered, a solitary traveller, vowed to a romantic quest, over the savage wastes, and amidst the fantastic limestone crags and caverns of the Eastern Andes; and at last, after many years of exploration, when I had become weary and heart-sick and prematurely aged, I found Eldorado—yes, I found it—chanced upon it in the hollows of the mountains. Oh! sir, the imagination of man cannot conceive a tithe of its golden glories! and, alas! the soul of man cannot fathom the mystery of horror that broods over and protects it!

"You have been my only friend in a strange land. I give you in requital all that I possess—the key to the secret. Full directions as to the difficult and hidden route are contained in the packet. But weigh well the matter, I implore you. I know that if you decide to undertake the adventure, you will set out armed with all the appliances of science, relying on a cool head and a brave heart. And yet, standing as I do upon the brink of eternity, I am tortured by the thought that, although I love you as a son, I may be doing you a great and grievous wrong in putting you upon the track. For death in its most terrific form lurks amidst the gold. My Indian guides perished to a man, and I only escaped from the house of treasure with empty hands and hopeless heart. More I will tell you presently; now I must rest."

With these words, the light suddenly faded from the old man's eyes. The strong emotion, which the narrative had given rise to, had exhausted his small remaining stock of energy. Pale and trembling, struggling for breath, and with the sweat of death upon his brow, he sank back on his pillow. Langford saw that he was making frantic efforts to speak, and bent his ear down to the lips of the moribund.

Ere the spirit passed away, he managed to catch the faintly-articulated words, "Beware of the Guardian of the Palace."

II.

ELDORADO.

Acquisitiveness is an important factor in the English character. It is all very

well to denounce it under the ugly name of greed; but where would our vast Colonial Empire—where would Greater Britain be, but for it? "Gentlemen adventurers," of the type of Drake and Morgan, no longer, it is true, ruffle it in our streets, "bearded like pards," and merrily chinking in the capacious pockets of their trunk-hose Spanish doubloons, the plunder of Spanish galleons; but, in place of these worthies, we have our syndicates, whose mission it is to exploit anything and everything under the sun, from a gold reef in Rhodesia or Coolgardie to a sunken pirate craft in Bantry Bay.

Yielding to the prevailing fashion of the day, and also, it must be added, to a sense of his own comparative imppecuniosity, John Langford formed a syndicate for the exploitation of the old American's treasure, of whose existence he did not entertain the slightest doubt, and of which he considered himself the rightful heir; and this syndicate was an eminently Liverpudlian, and therefore cosmopolitan one, as will be readily gathered from the names of its members: Constantine Arguopoulos, Adolphe de Versan, Heinrich Spiegel, Walter Kermode, Denis O'Flaherty, Levi Cohen, and Langford himself, the promoter, and the only Englishman of the party. All these gentlemen had been duly converted to his views by the young medico, and believed as firmly as himself that there was "something in the matter," and that that something was—money.

Let us eschew tedious preliminaries, and say that our "Seven Champions" of Mammon started from Birkenhead on board the s.s. *Casabianca*, of the Pacific line, and had a prosperous voyage to Callao. Here their adventure really began. They maintained the strictest secrecy as to the nature of their mission. Nor had they much difficulty on this score, inasmuch as Levi Cohen, who had been for some years in business at Valparaiso, was the only one of the party who knew Spanish. Much had to be done in the way of preparation for the expedition. Mules had to be purchased, Indian servants hired, and stores of *charqui* and other supplies procured.

When all was in readiness, the small party of twelve men, carefully avoiding

Lima and the railway connecting that city with the Andean plateau, set out for the south-east, in the direction of Cuzco, Langford, in whose possession were the maps, plans and order of the route, assuming the command. It was their intention, at a given point, to be indicated by him, to pay and dismiss their five peons, performing the remaining stages of the journey alone. Their golden secret was to be entrusted to none.

Their way, labyrinthine and intricate in the extreme, led them far from the haunts of civilisation, through scenes of savage grandeur, whose weird and impressive features were the work of the volcano and the earthquake, through deep cañons and defiles, where the light of day was well-nigh shut out by overhanging mountains, whose peaks at times assumed the form of petrified giants and ghastly monsters of the prime—the home of the formidable condor, the vulture of the Andes.

In these awful solitudes, where Nature ceases to smile, and dons the stern mask of a very Medusa, man sadly learns his true insignificance. The grim silence, the utter loneliness, the vast and dizzy heights that tower above him, the fathomless abysses that open beneath his feet—all these things read him a lesson in humility, which the busy thoroughfares of the city, his own creation, and the din of the crowded mart, where he is filled with a sense of his own importance, can never impart.

Even Langford, the most buoyant and sanguine of the party, found himself unable to dispel the cloud of depression which gradually settled upon his spirits. He had not considered himself bound to damp the ardour of his companions by repeating to them the ominous warning conveyed by the American with his latest breath; but now that he and they were nearing the goal of their quest, the words haunted him with terrible persistency, "*Beware of the Guardian of the Palace!*" The American's story had been left half-told; the King of Terror had intervened, to prevent the disclosure of one of the mysteries of his kingdom. Clayton had been no milksop, and there must be something very real and awful in the danger which he had thus vaguely described. He remembered now that a

look of horror, as though caused by some dire reminiscence, had shadowed the face of the dying man as he uttered the words. Who, then, could this eerie Guardian of the Palace be? Surmise, from the nature of the case, was futile; but the certainty of the peril, and the uncertainty as to its nature, made his heart sink within him. Most men, who are worthy of the name, will, like the Homeric Diomed, face any amount of foes in the open and by daylight with a firm and constant heart; but even the bravest dread the treacherous darkness and an unseen enemy.

And so they threaded their way through the devious mountain passes, until the day arrived when the Indians were dismissed and Langford announced, to the great satisfaction of his weary companions, that they were approaching the end of their journey. The welcome news banished their fatigue, hope revived within them, and in fancy they beheld themselves rifling the treasures of the dead Inca, Atabalipa.

It was a clear night, and the moon was just at her full, sharply silhouetting the grotesque pinnacles of rock that towered into the heavens wherever the eye was cast. Langford and his party, rounding a projecting cliff, began a steep and difficult descent into an amphitheatre embosomed by the mountains which rose almost perpendicularly around it. Hearts beat high, and brows flushed with joyous anticipation; for they knew that after their weary pilgrimage the land of promise had been gained at last. All at once a simultaneous cry arose from the seven men—"Gold! gold! gold!" There was something both ludicrous and pathetic in the unsophisticated and greedy enthusiasm of the little cosmopolitan band who had at least one thought in common. Their ecstasy, if sordid, was, as far as it went, quite as deep and genuine as that of Xenophon's Greeks when they saw the blue zone of their beloved "Thalatta" from the



"IT WAS A CLEAR NIGHT"

mountains of Pontus—as that of the Crusaders when between the gaps of the barren serrated limestone ridges of Palestine they caught their first dim glimpse of Jerusalem.

What Langford and the members of his syndicate beheld was this: a city, still, silent, and deserted, covering the superficies of the hidden valley. It was indeed a city of the dead that slumbered there in the revealing moonlight, but—a city of gold. Here were vast pylons, like those of Carnac; there were mighty hypæthral temples and palaces, and uncouth images of birds and beasts and composite monsters, shadowy and cyclopean as the relics of a vanished past that frown from the portals of Mycenæ or stud the solitude of Yucatan; but every column, every entablature, every pilaster, every statue shot forth

the fiery gleam of gold in answer to the pale challenge of the lunar rays.

Was it a dream? was it an illusion? was it a subjective hypnotic hallucination? or was it in very deed a dazzling reality? They were only mortal, and the conquering radiance of the splendid vision overcame them. They veiled their faces with trembling hands, almost fearing that when they removed them they might find the golden panorama vanished like a mirage of the desert. Tears coursed down their sunburnt faces; they cheered themselves hoarse; they crowded round Langford, congratulating him and themselves; and then with much haste they rushed rather than descended into the valley. Here was treasure enough, they thought, to buy up all Europe.

And their hunger and exhaustion were forgotten. Late on into the night they roamed through the deathly stillness of halls and colonnades and basilicas, all built of the sacred and precious metal, occasionally meeting with stately altars erected in honour of the Sun, the supreme god of the Peruvian, and colossal images of inferior divinities, adorned and encrusted with blazing diamonds, rubies incarnadine, and other gems, of a size and brilliance unknown to the Old World.

At last it was time to bivouac—to sleep and dream and wait for the glorious morrow. Side by side they rested in the great central hall of Eldorado; but while they slept the Guardian of the Palace kept vigil.

III.

THE GUARDIAN OF THE PALACE

Golden pillars and pylons were already flashing beneath the open eye of day when six of the sleepers arose from what had been rather a black, dreamless lethargy than a refreshing slumber, to find that of the seventh of their number, Constantine Arguopoulos, the Greek—who, as it chanced, had been the last of the row of recumbent figures, and nearest to the steps of a lofty altar of the Sun at the end of the hall—nothing remained but a skeleton. Not a shred, not a particle of flesh was left upon the bones, and the ghastly thing

lay white and gleaming upon the golden floor, as though it had been carefully prepared for an anatomical museum, while the skull, from its eyeless sockets, seemed to gaze up into the faces of the terrified men with a stereotyped and mocking grin.

Not for the first time in the world's history had Death accompanied with Mammon. But when, how, and in what form had he entered that midnight hall of Eldorado? Who or what had been his fell agent, slaying, devouring in silence and in darkness, leaving no fragment of brain or viscera behind, no trace of blood upon the burnished golden slabs of the pavement. They had encountered neither beast nor bird, nor any other living thing in the deserted city. Whence, then, came the mysterious enemy? Awhile they wearied themselves with vain surmises, awhile they shudderingly contemplated the grim anatomy; then they hid it away out of sight, and wandered afield to feast their eyes upon the resplendent domain of Atabalipa, which they had inherited, bewildered by the fresh riches which every onward step revealed.

With the approach of night, their terror revived. They resolved to adopt every possible precaution to guard against another surprise from their awful visitant. They chose a different resting-place, and they agreed to keep watch by turns, each man's vigil to last an hour. Having arranged that the rotation should be according to seniority—*seniores priores*—they turned in at twelve o'clock, strictly enjoining Levi Cohen, who, as the *doyen* of the party, was to take the first watch, not to sleep at his post.

That night a strange thing happened. Levi Cohen never alarmed his successor in the watch; his five companions lay motionless as corpses until daybreak, and then woke to find to their horror that the Jew had shared the fate of the Greek.

And still—such is the perversity of human nature—the glamour of gold held them in the abodes of death; and still John Langford hugged his accursed secret to his breast, torture him as it might. He now grasped, in part at all events, the frightful import of the

dying American's warning; but he never named the dread Guardian of the Palace to his associates, partly from shame at having concealed the matter so long, and partly because he recognised with anguish of spirit that the revelation would now be too late.

When the sixth night fell the only survivors of the doomed party were the German, Heinrich Spiegel, and Langford himself. They vowed with feverish energy that they would break the accursed spell of Atabalipa. They would talk, they would smoke, they would keep each other awake; arm-in-arm they would perambulate Eldorado beneath the Peruvian moon and stars until the advent of dawn. The horrible fear of impending death, like a grim sentinel within their hearts, would assuredly banish all tendency to sleep. That night they would arrange their plans for breaking forth on the morrow from this golden shambles—wrenching themselves free for ever from the fatal fascination of the place, and only taking

away with them some of the largest and finest diamonds and rubies.

Everything went well until twelve o'clock. Then the usual deadly stupor crept gradually over Heinrich Spiegel. His attention wandered, his words became irrelevant and disconnected, and at last his limbs refused to do their office. With a despairing cry to Langford not to desert him, he flung himself down, a helpless prey to the coma that rapidly supervened.

John Langford kept faithful watch beside his friend. He was a man of splendid physical courage and an iron will; on that night of horror he succeeded in a feat which neither he nor his comrades had yet performed; for at the cost of a tremendous struggle he remained awake, and so attained to something more than a partial knowledge of the evil mystery of the place.

As he sat huddled up in his cloak beside the German, he was suddenly aware of a pungent odour as of musk that pervaded the night. The next



"JOHN LANGFORD KEPT FAITHFUL WATCH BESIDE HIS FRIEND"

moment the light of the moon was intercepted by what seemed to be the broad, expanded, sable pinions of a gigantic bird, huge as the roc of Eastern fable, or the hideous pterodactyls of the infant world, and resembling in aspect, but far surpassing in bulk, the mighty condor of the Andes. Swooping down from the heavens with swift but noiseless motion, the dire monster alighted beside the sleeping man.

Langford distinctly saw its eyes of flame—saw it plunge its vulture beak

into the German's bosom, and then swooned away.

* * * *

On the morrow a skeleton lay beside John Langford. Chilled to the breast with horror, with wild, dazed face and lack-lustre eyes, he consigned the bones of the last of his comrades to a rude grave. Then this sole survivor of the syndicate, laying no hand upon gold or gems, turned and fled for his life from the treasure-city of Atabalipa and the fell clutches of the demon Guardian of the Palace.





WRITTEN BY REGINALD BACCHUS AND RANGER GULL. ILLUSTRATED BY
SYDNEY ALDRIDGE

CONCEIVE my position. Night was falling very shrewd, with rain coming up black from the sea. I could hardly see my way a yard before and not at all behind, and the moor was full of break-neck places hid among the heather. I had no impulse in me but just to sit down and swear, only the moor seemed too lonely for my own voice. I was a fool to have left Plymouth on such a day of cloud-rack and coming storm. There seemed nothing a man might do for shelter. I roamed the moor like a lost sheep, and I believe I would have welcomed a prison-breaking convict from Princes Town, so lonely was I. My flask was empty of comfort, there was never a match in any pocket of my coat, and I was sorely hungry. There seemed no chance of succour, and I was beginning to think I should spend a merry night alone upon the moor, when I ran hard up against the stone wall of a house. The house stood up alone in the middle of the moor, with no garden or fence to shield it, and I felt my way round, no great distance, till I came to a door, upon which I beat lustily. The door opened and the light ran out of it, cutting the darkness with a golden knife. I heard a voice asking me to

enter, but at first I could not see from whom it came because my eyes were blinded. When I had gone in and was seated by the fire, I saw my entertainer was a man well set up and of a good carriage, but curious in face. It was difficult to determine whether he was a young man or an old one. His hair was grey, verging on white indeed, and his face was lined, but his eyes were a young man's eyes and his skin was healthy and clear. The room itself was furnished like a monk's cell. The floor was bare of carpet, there were no pictures on the walls, and there were only three articles of furniture, two chairs and a table, all of massive build, clamped to the floor.

I never saw such an empty room. A few books lay about the floor, and a shelf on the wall bore some eating utensils and a loaf of bread. I was beginning to thank my entertainer, when he started violently and began to tremble.

"You will think my request a strange one," he said, "but believe me, I am not mad, and you would confer a favour upon me. Might I ask you to place your walking-stick in the further corner of the room."

I was taken aback by his request and his evident discomposure, but I could not afford to quarrel with the warmth and chance of supper, so I did as he

desired, looking at him in amazement. When I had returned to my chair by the fire and he was at the other seat by the table, he apologised and said, "My request will seem very strange to you, sir, and this bare room and lonely dwelling-place must also have aroused your wonder. I can explain them both, and have nothing to hide, and if you

THE ADVENTURE OF THE WHISTLING OMELETTE.

Aylmer Facinorious was a young musician of some promise and of a sunny, happy disposition. Throughout his life he made it his business to be always pleasant with himself, and though his earnings were not far from meagre he



"THE DOOR OPENED, AND THE LIGHT RAN OUT OF IT"

will help yourself to any food and wine that is upon the shelf, I will tell you my story. First, however, I will replenish the fire."

He took a log from a pile by the hearth—I noticed he handled it very gingerly—and placed it on the flames. Then he told me the following story.

kept a bright face, and when he could not afford to purchase a cigar vowed that there was nothing like a pipe. He lived in Chelsea among the artists, and in the evening at winter time, in some big studio where the firelight flickered on the walls and his friends sat silent, he would often sit at the piano and improvise sound-pictures for them or play to them some

dainty dance of old gold and green by Grieg.

Among the circle of artists with whom he lived there were two girls who shared a flat together, and with one of them, Audrey Anderson, he fell violently in love. Audrey was ready to be won, and promised to marry him, but as she had very little money, and Aylmer had none at all, it was obvious that they must wait.

Wait they did for more than three years, and at the end of that time, though they were more in love than ever, they were both as poor as before. They wanted to be married very much, and the sacred and close communion of husband and wife seemed the only thing in the world; but as neither of them were very brilliant at their work, they could not find a way to the most modest *eldorado*. Hope deferred made their heart—for they had but one between them—very sick indeed, and Audrey began to grow pale and to fret. Aylmer, in desperation, produced the trashiest of songs, which, despite the large numbers that he could easily produce, still failed to bring him any prospect of a sufficient income.

One evening, bright and fair to most of the world, but very gloomy to Aylmer, after a weary and fruitless round of visits to music dealers, he turned into a little restaurant in Soho. Audrey was in the country, and London seemed more than usually grim and unfriendly to the young man. A chance in his wanderings brought him by this place, where he had often been very happy with his sweetheart over a simple dinner and a bottle of cheap claret.

The small room upstairs was almost empty, for it was early, and Aylmer noticed only two people as he pushed open the swing doors—an old gentleman who was a *habitué* of the place and a stranger who sat at a table by the window. As the night was rather hot and the window was open, Aylmer took a seat at the same table, and after a minute or two found himself in easy talk with his *vis-à-vis*. The stranger, a tall, thin-faced man with a mass of red hair pushed back from a singularly high forehead, introduced himself at once as Mr. Paul Bullo, scientific investigator, late of Kansas City and now of London.

He seemed to take it for granted that their friendship was a settled thing, and plunged at once into an animated conversation on a variety of intimate subjects. He told Aylmer all about his early struggles in the Western States, how he had worked at any job that he could find in order to feed and clothe himself, while all his spare hours and many of his nights were spent in ceaseless scientific experiments. A small invention connected with the working of railroad signals had brought him enough money to send him East, and he had become a workman in Mr. Edison's laboratory. From this point his progress in scientific knowledge had been very rapid, and at the age of thirty-three he found himself one of Edison's right-hand men, and possessed of a reputation that made him known to the first scientific circles of Europe.

It was a few years after this that his uncle, Rupert Hocker, met with a violent death at the hands of his own workmen who were out on strike, and left him the whole of his immense fortune and a partnership in the great pork-packing industry of Hocker, Sweetman and Bock, Chicago, Ill. Mr. Bullo had immediately sold his share in the business, as he inherited from his mother's family a suspicion of Jewish blood which made him disinclined to be prominently connected with the bacon trade. Possessed at last of the means to gratify every desire, he had spent ten years in extended travel round the world, visiting in turn every laboratory and scientist of repute. Then, when near upon his fiftieth year, he had settled in London to spend the rest of his life producing new inventions and elaborating those which he had already conceived. He told Aylmer all about his house in Bloomsbury Square, and the many strange conceits that it contained. He said that with his marvellous system of electrical machines he needed but the assistance of a cook and engineer to supply him with every detail of modern luxury, and told how, by the pressure of a finger, he could gratify his ear with the sweetest music, or dream for a space to the sound of life-like imitations of singing birds. Sometimes he would please his eye with moving pictures caught by the camera from all

the countries of the globe. His house was his own world to him, he said, and he rarely went out among men save on those rare intervals when the noiseless forms that flitted across his picture sheets seemed to shame him into the confession that even the happiest of recluses must now and then rub shoulders with mankind.

He told the story of his life in a brisk and graphic manner, eating and drinking meanwhile with a rapidity and precision that were almost mechanical.

Aylmer listened with extreme interest, rarely interrupting the course of the narrative save for an occasional exclamation of surprise and wonder as Mr. Bullo detailed with extraordinary lucidity his invention and working of some new engine or apparatus. At the end of his recital the American paused, seeming to invite a return of confidences, and Aylmer, who was greatly attracted by the man's personality, poured out the details of his own life struggle, his love, and the apparent hopelessness of the future.

When he had finished, and the little restaurant, which during their talk had been crowded, was now empty again, Mr. Bullo spoke.

"And now," said he, "our dinner has been much spoiled by our talk; will you join me in an omelette which they make for me according to a special recipe of my own. I can promise you that you will like it."

Aylmer acquiesced, and in a few minutes the patron himself appeared with the omelette which he placed before Mr. Bullo in a manner which was at once deferential and awe-stricken.

"Would you oblige me by cutting it," said Mr. Bullo, "It is a conceit of mine to prefer my guest to do that duty on the occasions that I have this particular dish."

Aylmer drew the knife, quickly across the steaming omelette, when suddenly it emitted a loud strident whistle, and rearing itself upon its end began to pirouette daintily round the dish.

"A little invention of my own," said the millionaire in a delighted tone. "You see it is quite simple," and capturing the spinning confection, he withdrew a tiny glittering object. "This is all," he said;

"your knife surprised the mechanism, and you see the result. I have made an especial study of mechanical jests as applied to cooked dishes, and frequently amuse my friends in this fashion. Last Christmas Day, I had a plum-pudding, out of which, when opened, mechanical dickie-birds, painted to represent the feathered songsters of all countries, flew to different perches about the room and warbled for upwards of twenty minutes. It was a pretty prank. And now I must be upon my way. Here is my card. Should you feel inclined to visit me, I have a plan which with the aid of a little courage on your part may place you in a position to be speedily married." He summoned the waiter, and, despite Aylmer's protestations, insisting on paying the bill for the two dinners, left the room very quietly.

Three times was the young musician in imminent peril of being run over as he made his way to Piccadilly Circus to find his omnibus. The indefinite promise of the millionaire following on the wonderful stories that he told, produced an extraordinary exhilaration in Aylmer's mind, and he drifted through the crowded streets realising nothing but the beautiful future he was planning in his own thoughts. At last, after the pole of an omnibus had grazed his shoulder, and he felt the hot, strong breath of the horses upon his cheek, he pulled himself together, and as a relief to his feelings was extravagant to the extent of a long telegram to Audrey. He smiled to see how the amatory wording of it stiffened the good post-mistress's cheek to a frigid displeasure.

He judged it best not to be too impatient in his visit to Mr. Bullo, and it was not till nearly a week had passed that one wet, clammy summer's evening found him on the doorstep of the house in Bloomsbury Square. The door opened suddenly, and Aylmer was confronted with a large hall somewhat bare of furniture. As there was no servant to be seen, he stood upon the threshold for a moment not quite knowing what to do, until he saw an arm of wood shoot out from the wall bearing in its fingers a card with the legend "Up one flight of stairs and the first door to the right." He followed the directions nervously,

bearing in mind the many mechanical pleasantries of whose existence about the house Mr. Bullo had apprised him. He reached the door, and as his foot touched the mat it opened and he walked into a room entirely bare of furniture, save for one arm-chair by the fire, in which Mr. Bullo was sitting. The latter welcomed the young man with a great show of enthusiasm, and pressing a knob in the elaborately carved mantelpiece, caused a panel in the wall to swing back. Out of the opening another arm-chair ran upon wheels, easily and noiselessly, while it was followed by a small table bearing bottles and glasses.

"Here is sherry," said Mr. Bullo, "or if you prefer it, spirits. Supper will be ready in one minute, and you must be contented with a cold feast, for though I thought you would come to-night, I could not be certain of the hour." They fell to talk, and Aylmer was presently astounded to see a band of rats run quickly across the floor and disappear

into holes that opened to receive them. They were pursued by a pair of magnificent cats, and Aylmer could hear the rattle of the mechanism as they nosed about the holes.

Mr. Bullo clapped his hands. "You must excuse me," he said, "for my childishness in thus forcing my wonders upon your notice, but they are so dear to me, and it is such a pleasure to have a new audience for their exhibition."

In a few more minutes there was a faint sound of a bugle coming from the lower part of the house. Mr. Bullo stamped his foot twice, and almost immediately the floor parted in the centre and a magnificently appointed table covered with the choicest of viands rose into sight. "I must apologise once more," said Mr. Bullo, "for this somewhat antique device, which smacks, I admit, of the Christmas pantomime, but I have tried in vain to invent a new one which should work with the like simplicity. At any rate, here is supper."



"THEY WERE PURSUED BY A PAIR OF MAGNIFIC NT CATS"

They both did excellent justice to the feast before them. Never in his life had Aylmer tasted such delicately cooked foods or sipped such rare wines, so that when the supper-table gave way to another loaded with fruits, sweets from New York and Paris, and the most expensive kinds of cigars, he was in the best possible humour to accede to any proposition, however hazardous, that his host might put to him. During the meal itself nothing extraordinary had taken place, but at dessert, Mr. Bullo's face took on once more the deprecatory smile that Aylmer had begun to recognise as herald of impending wonders. Leaning forward he appeared to touch some spring concealed among the flowers. Immediately a little fountain tinkled in the centre of the table, music from a hidden orchestra floated about their ears, while upon a great silver dish three bananas rose upon end, and began lustily to buffet themselves upon a pineapple, which, throwing out long tentacles, defended itself sturdily from its foes.

"Well," said Mr. Bullo, "I have played the magician enough. Now, come into my study, which is entirely free from mechanical tricks, and we will talk over the plan that I am about to propose to you."

The study was a small room, very comfortable, and Aylmer, who was beginning to experience a nervousness whenever he saw Mr. Bullo stretch out his hand, was relieved to see the whisky and tobacco produced without any appeal to science. The millionaire lost no time in opening the subject.

"At Lower Edmonton," he said, "hard by the cottage where the late Mr. Charles Lamb wrote many of his instructive essays, there is a house. This house is my property, and on it I have spent five years and many thousands of pounds. It contains, and I am not boasting, the most perfect products now existing of applied mechanics. It is, sir, a *trick-house*!"

Mr. Bullo's voice had quite lost its earlier tone of banter, and he looked very shrewdly at his young guest as he continued.

"The tricks are not of the same pleasant and harmless nature as those with which I have this evening enter-

tained you, but are in some cases serious attacks upon the person, and many of the things that may happen in this house are sufficient to try the nerves and courage of the bravest and most alert man who should venture to pass a night there. In fact, no one has ever done so since the machinery has been in working order, and I am prepared to offer £20,000 to the man who shall stay in that house three whole days and nights and come out alive. None of the traps I have laid are necessarily fatal. It is a fair bet. A brave man against the products of a scientist's brain and twenty thousand pounds if he wins. Do you take me, young sir? and do you think there is any one who will pit himself against my brains for so large a sum of money? Yourself, for instance. You have no money and yet you are very anxious for marriage. Will you go to my house, and try for the £20,000? As you stand, what is your future? It is the worst of all penury, genteel penury. If you marry, your love may make you happy for a time despite the odds, but you are a man of the world, and you must know the inevitable end. A family, possible sickness, a sordid struggle for life, and gradual starvation. Now look at the other picture—the 'bid for freedom' let us call it. Three bad days and nights—possibly not so very bad, as I may be over-confident of my machinery—then the £20,000 for you when you come out; nearly £800 a year, marriage, and lifelong happiness with Audrey. Come, I will give you three days to decide. You need not be afraid of being defrauded. Everything shall be in order; my solicitor will draw up an agreement for us to sign. To-day is the seventh, on the tenth I shall expect an answer. I think you will be my man."

Aylmer was silent for quite ten minutes. The clock ticked feverishly, seeming to hurry rather than to measure time; and Mr. Bullo, crouched in his chair, was watching intently, an extraordinary brilliance in his eyes.

"You say that none of the tricks are designedly fatal; you give me your word on that?" the young man said at last.

"I pledge you my word of honour!" said the millionaire, jumping up with

outstretched hand. "The scheme sounds wild and mad, I own, but it is my hobby. I have always been madly fascinated by machinery. If you went careless and unprepared anything might happen, but going as you do, awake to every chance, you have no business to be killed. You'll get badly frightened, no doubt, but that's all!"

"I suppose you won't give me any idea of what may happen?" said Aylmer.

"That wouldn't be fair!" answered Mr. Bullo, with a chuckle. "I cannot do that! I will say, however, that there is nothing like pasteboard ghosts or tricks with limelight. Everything is purely mechanical. It is simply a big mechanical joke; rather a dangerous one, perhaps, but then there is a big compensation. But wait a minute, I will introduce you to Mr. Willy, my engineer; he has been my right-hand man in carrying out the scheme."

He pressed a bell, and in a few seconds the door opened and Mr. Willy appeared. He was a small man, broad, and brown of face, with extremely deep lines round his eyes and mouth. His eyes, which twinkled incessantly, were bright blue, and as he spoke the Welsh accent rapped sharp and crisp upon the ear. He was wiping the oil from his fingers with a tattered cloth as he entered the room, and he apologised to Mr. Bullo for his grimy condition.

"Look you, sir, I have made her fly at last," he cried, and producing a mechanical owl from one of his capacious pockets he cast it up in the air. The solemn bird circled twice round the room, and then perching on the mantelshelf said "Mister Willy" three times, and in the most natural manner in the world.

Mr. Bullo ran to it at once and patted it lovingly. "Thank you, Willy, thank you!" he cried, "we shall soon have the whole animal kingdom. I have an idea for a giraffe which—but I forget. There is more serious work toward. Let me introduce you to my young friend, Mr. Aylmer Facinorious, who is very likely going to stay at Lever Lodge and try for my guineas."

Mr. Willy shot a quick, cunning smile at his master, but the latter's face did not move. "Tell him, Willy," he

went on, "that he isn't going to be killed, only frightened and perhaps a trifle bruised,—eh, Willy?"

Mr. Willy fumbled with the piece of cotton waste that he still held in his hand, and looked from one man to the other before he answered. All his movements were very quick and jerky and the especial twinkle of his eye and the endless quivering of his shoulders gave him the appearance, which was quite false, of a nervous man. "Oh no, sir," he answered; "believe me, sir, indeed there will be no danger of life whatever."

"Very well," said Aylmer, "I will let you know, Mr. Bullo, before the week is out. I have not to my knowledge ever made an enemy. I am, therefore, disinclined to believe that you should have any wish to take my life. It is, as you say, Mr. Willy, a great deal of money, and I am a fairly desperate man. The possession of this money would ensure the happiness of my life, and I think that I shall go to your house. Well, I will say good night. Thank you very much, Mr. Bullo, for your most excellent supper and the entertaining evening that you have given me. Mr. Willy, I have no doubt we shall meet again. Good night."

When he was outside in the open air he drew a deep breath and turned once to look up at the gloomy house. All the windows were brilliantly lighted, and he could see, sharply silhouetted against one of the blinds, the black figures of Mr. Bullo and Mr. Willy, each holding a wine-glass. At the same moment the sound of loud brazen music, mocking music it seemed, came out over the square. It was a sudden flourish of trumpets, and when it ceased he could hear the panting of a gas-engine in the cellar.

He set himself to walk home, for at this time the omnibuses and trains had ceased running and he had no money for a cab. The wet mist which he had left outside when he entered the house was now gone, and the pavements were bright and clean as his footsteps struck echoes from the flags. He enjoyed his long walk, and as every step took him further from Bloomsbury he felt the more determined to brave the un-

known terrors of the house at Edmonton, and the more certain that he would come victorious from the ordeal. There were but few wayfarers at that hour of the night, and when, at Hyde Park Corner, the dawn came, he stood and watched for a while.

He slept but little and sat alone all the next day waiting for Audrey, who was coming home in the evening. He had made up his mind that he would tell her nothing of his dangerous purpose, but would pretend an engagement to play at a provincial concert to explain his three days' absence. He felt supremely confident in himself, but as the hour of his sweetheart's coming drew nearer he found it hard to repress a feeling of nervousness, a fear of some untimely accident that should take him for ever from Audrey. At six o'clock he went to Paddington, and presently the great engine glided majestically into the station at the head of its train. By a lucky chance the carriage in which Audrey was drew up exactly opposite where he was standing, and in a moment his lady was in his arms.

Neither of them could ever see why they should not embrace in a station. As Audrey herself said, "We love each other, so what *does* anything else matter?"

When they were in the cab Aylmer forgot everything for a time. To have her little slim hand in his—with the tyranny of a lover he had made her take off her glove—to be close to her in a little world of their own, to watch her sweet face all aglow with tenderness and trust, this indeed was the great thing in life.

"Darling," he said, "love of my heart, I can think of nothing but you. Oh, I have wanted you so. How splendid when we shall always be together for ever and ever. It's awfully strange, but I don't want any companionship but yours—just to be with you, that is all."

Then Audrey asked him the question that she always asked him because it was so sweet to hear his protestations. "Darling, will you always love me—when I am old and ugly, even?"

So for half-an-hour they prattled like children, hand in hand. They at least

knew the best life has to give. To them, though they had little else, was given the supreme and inexpressible joy.

The cab spun rapidly through the pleasant streets of the West End, and the drive came to an end all too soon for the lovers. Aylmer gave up Audrey to Miss Chilmaid, the girl with whom she lived, and, promising to be back later in the evening, went home to a solitary dinner. It was not until after they had been together for more than an hour that he dared to tell her of his prospective absence. The thought of lying to this sweet, good girl was horrible to him, and when at last he summed up enough courage to announce his concert engagement at Ipswich, and the probability of his being away for three days, it was with bald words and a blushing face.

Audrey said very little. She was sorry to be parted from him so soon again, but engagements of any sort were rare and had to be welcomed with considerable joy. Soon afterwards they said good night, and Aylmer wrote to Mr. Bullo accepting his challenge in the matter of the house, and suggesting a meeting on the following day for the drawing up of a proper agreement. He said that on the day after he would be ready to go to Edmonton. He received a telegram from Mr. Bullo in the morning, and at three o'clock was closeted with him in the private room of Mr. Hartley, a solicitor, in Chancery Lane.

The formalities were few and quickly despatched, so that by half-past four Aylmer was once more in Mr. Bullo's house. It had been decided that he was to go to Edmonton at once with Mr. Willy, and to dine in Bloomsbury Square before setting out.

Dinner was agreeably free from mechanical pleasantries, and at eight o'clock Mr. Bullo rang for Mr. Willy, and the three went into the study for a final drink and cigar before the commencement of the adventure. At half-past eight Mr. Bullo rose from his chair, and, going to the young man, shook him warmly by the hand.

"The time has come, my young friend," he said, "let me thank you

again for your acceptance of my wager. You are a man, I can see, and I doubt my machines will frighten you but little. We shall see, and believe me, Mr. Facinorious, it will be with the greatest pleasure that I shall hand you my cheque on Friday. Now I commend you to the guidance of Mr. Willy. He will leave you in Lever Lodge and will set the machine in action. At midnight exactly on Friday. Au revoir, Mr. Facinorious, and good luck."

They were not long about their journey, for Mr. Bullo's carriage whirled them quickly to the station and the train started immediately. When they arrived at Edmonton, Mr. Willy explained that the house was close at hand, and they set out for it on foot. Lever Lodge was a square and compact building of not at all a forbidding aspect, standing in a pleasant garden that was surrounded by a red-brick wall.

Mr. Willy walked with Aylmer up the gravel path that led from the garden gate to the front door, and, turning the lock with a latch-key, showed the young man into a brilliantly lighted hall, and then, bidding him a good evening, banged the door behind him.

THE FIRST DAY.

Aylmer paused for a moment irresolute. The hall was large and almost bare of furniture. The very emptiness of the place seemed sinister, and cold fear suddenly claimed the young man as her own. Through a tall window opposite to him he could see the moon floating peacefully among soft clouds, and the mellow sound of lowing cattle came at intervals over the fields. He was seized with a frantic desire to get out into the world, and, turning back, he shook at the door. There were no apparent means for opening it. Locks and bolts it appeared to have none, and he was forced to accept the situation and realise that he was really a prisoner in this house of fantastic horrors. He stood there, his stick poised as in self-defence, while the loud ticks of a tall clock seemed to mock him with their cold regularity. Nothing happened, and he remembered that Mr. Willy had told him he would

find food and wine in a lower room, and that, should sleep oppress him, there was a sleeping chamber prepared upon the upper floor. He walked a little down the hall, placing his feet very gingerly.

A rack fitted with clips for sticks and umbrellas stood against the wall, and he placed his stick in one of them. To his unutterable surprise, as he did so, the stick was caught up by the clip and struck him two violent blows upon the face.

He stumbled back smarting with pain and fell against the opposite wall. His walking-stick, a light malacca cane, fell back into the rack with a rattle and the vestibule was as silent as before. The unexpectedness of the thing frightened him for a moment, but he soon remembered that it was not very dreadful after all. He resolved to try and unravel the mystery, and very carefully he went up to the rack and quickly grasped the cane. To his surprise it came out quite easily, and when he felt the clip he found it apparently a fixture with no trace of anything unusual about it. Puzzled and smarting, yet admiring the cleverness of the apparatus, he walked down the hall in search of food.

He came to some stairs which led downwards, and tightly grasping the banisters, for he had thoughts of a possible trap-door beneath his feet, he went down to the bottom. The stairway and the passage at the foot of it were all brilliantly lighted by electricity. There were several doors in the passage, and while he was hesitating which he should open, his eyes fell upon one of them to which a card was nailed bearing the words "SUPPER. FIRST DAY."

He opened it without mishap, and a comfortable room discovered itself with a cold supper neatly set forth upon a table in the centre. Everything looked particularly inviting. Aylmer began to remember the genial eccentricities of the millionaire, and to think that possibly there was not much in the wager after all, and that this might be but a fantastic method of doing him a service.

He sat down with much satisfaction before a bottle of sherry and a cold duck, making a very hearty supper. Only

one mechanical pleasantry disturbed his feast, and this partook of the nature of a comedy, and did not fail to afford him some amusement. About half-way through the meal the mustard-pot—a handsome utensil of silver—opened its lid and remarked something that bore a suspicious resemblance to Mr. Bullo's "twenty thousand pounds," and then, with a sudden cackle of laughter, shut with a click.

Thoughts of the phonograph immediately came into Aylmer's mind, and his suspicions became a certainty when he found that the pot was fixed to the table. After supper he found some excellent cigarettes on the mantelshelf, and seating himself in a roomy chair was soon enjoying the luxury of the post-prandial tobacco. His mind was mellowed by his meal, and he allowed his eyes to wander lazily round the handsome room. He was pleased to see a small piano in the corner, with a richly carved case of ebony, and when he had finished his cigarette he went over to it, thinking to pass an hour pleasantly with Chopin.

He began a nocturne of which the first few notes were struck entirely upon the base and treble notes, leaving the central octaves untouched. Then, when he touched a black note in the centre of the instrument the first attempt upon his life was made by the hellish ingenuity of Mr. Bullo. As his finger descended on a key in the very centre of the board a sharp report sounded in his ears, and he felt something like a red-hot iron touch his cheek, while simultaneously a quantity of smoke curled out from a carved boss in the front of the piano. His cheek began to bleed profusely where it had been grazed by a bullet, and with a sick horror in his veins he staggered to the table and poured himself out a glass of wine. Had the aim of the concealed pistol which he had unconsciously fired been directed an inch more to the right his brain would have been penetrated, and he would have been lying a corpse upon the carpet!

He sat down again upon the chair, and began to realise to what he had pledged himself. His former cheerful thoughts were violently dispelled, and

he began to see with unmistakable clearness that he was in a house of horror, from which it was unlikely he would ever emerge. Little things in Mr. Bullo's manner came back to him with a new significance, and were made plain in the light of his recent experience. He felt sure that he was doomed, and with that thought came the thought of his love, Audrey. The anguish was unspeakable. He had said a long farewell to those dark eyes and small caressing hands. His fingers went to his watch-chain, where he had fastened a little golden cross which she had given him.

As he sat still with bowed head, grasping the charm, he began to repress and control the agony that was surging over him. His pain began to condense in his soul and turn to strong purpose. At length he rose up proudly, still grasping the little cross. "I will be a man," he said out loud, as if challenging the watchful engines which lay waiting all around him. "If I die, I will die as a man; if I live, Fortune is kind to me. Even if I die I shall see Audrey again somehow, and it's not long to wait."

Then with a firm step and smoking a fresh cigarette, he left the room and went up the stairs into the hall. His manhood had come back, and he felt prepared to endure and contend with anything. He saw by the clock that it was very late, and the excitement of the day had left him weary, so he determined to find a bed and sleep. Accordingly he mounted the stairs warily. When he reached the top of the stairs he looked back into the hall, and even as he did so the electric light faded away as if he were being watched by some unseen intelligence. The landing on which he stood was still lit, and resolutely suppressing fear he walked round it, surveying the closed doors in turn. On the door which was to his right hand as he ascended he found the following label:

BEDROOM. FIRST NIGHT.

He stood upon the mat hesitating whether to go in or not, when there was a rattle in the lintel. Turning sharply towards the sound, he saw a little shelf

had fallen down on which was a note addressed to him by name. He took it up and found it ran as follows:—

MY DEAR FACINORIOUS,—You are no doubt by this time thoroughly frightened, and imagine it is my fixed intention to kill you. Now listen. There is no reason why you should die. I do not deny that there are plenty of possibilities that you may unwarily fall into one of the many traps set for you. That is a part of the wager between us—a wager which is a fair and above-board one. On the other hand, I assert with absolute sincerity that by unceasing watchfulness you may win the wager unharmed. I am not, I repeat, the bloody-minded monster you imagine me to be. Yours, BULLO.

Aylmer read this note with great care. It gave him new courage and he remembered that after all it was his own choice that he was there. The proud resignation that had sustained him gave place to hope, and he began to experience something of the joy of contest, the pleasure of pitting his brains and cunning against the grim and lifeless adversaries awaiting him on every side.

He opened the bedroom door with great caution, and finding the room within was dark, struck a lucifer match upon his heel. Then he saw a gas-bracket by the fireplace, and, advancing slowly towards it, he turned the tap and held the match up to the burner. There was a sudden hissing noise, louder than the ordinary sound of rushing gas, a slight pop as the gas ignited, and a long rod of light flashed out at him, hitting him on the shoulder.

In a moment his coat and shirt were a mass of flames. The flame went right through the fabric of his clothes, and scorched the skin beneath, before he could rush back out of its path. Directly he had done so, and was crushing out the life of the fire with one of the bed coverings, the jet of gas flashed back into the bracket, and the room was dark for several seconds. Then the electric light began to glow from a globe in the ceiling. The pain from the burn was intense, and he sank down on the bed, too conscious of the physical sensation to be very clear as to what had happened. When the first agony was over, and he could suffer with more equanimity, he felt that, despite his resolutions of caution, he had been very foolish.

Had he examined the gas-bracket in

the first instance, he could not have failed to notice the nozzle which directed the jet of gas, and the unusual appearance of the burner would have warned him from tampering with it. Perils menaced him at every step, and it was only by an almost superhuman prudence that he could save himself.

When he thought of Audrey, his courage became strong again, and the sense of absolute power and resolve that sometimes comes to a man in great peril calmed his nerves. He fell asleep, still thinking of her, and though his wounded cheek and scorched shoulder were very painful, he was little awake during the night.

THE SECOND DAY.

The morning was flooding the room with sunlight when he awoke. He could not believe himself to be in peril. The decent, comely room, with its bath full of water standing by the bed, the sun pouring in at the window, the song of the birds in the garden outside, all combined to make the events of the night before seem some evil dream, which had fled before the sun. His injuries were better, and in every way he felt a man again. At the same time, he could not but think that the ingenuity of Mr. Bullo and Mr. Willy would have foreseen this, and that it behoved him to be very much upon his guard.

He got out of bed, and carefully examined the bath. It was one of those shallow saucer baths, and it seemed as if nothing could possibly be wrong with it. Standing by the side was a cork mat. His first idea was that possibly the liquid in the bath was not water at all, but some acid which might burn him. He put the tip of his finger into it, but found it to be unmistakable water, both to taste and touch. Then it occurred to him to move the bath close to the window, as there seemed some companionship in the birds and green trees outside.

When he caught hold of the rim of the bath to pull it along he found his prudence rewarded. Something was not quite right, for the bath was fixed to the floor and would not move. When he made this discovery he stepped back, one foot resting upon the cork mat. He fancied for a moment that the mat gave

as he trod upon it, and simultaneously he heard most unmistakably a sharp metallic click. He knelt down by the mat, and after an attentive examination found that it had sunk a quarter of an inch into the floor.

He had a strong knife in his pocket, and inserting it in the crack at the edge of the mat was able with its aid to prise it up. It lifted like the lid of a box and disclosed a trough in the flooring full of wheels and shining metal bars. Aylmer could not repress a smile of satisfaction. To find some of the hidden machinery, to see the veritable agents of the trickery, seemed to rob the place of half its terror. These sudden and mysterious occurrences had all the horror of their mystery, and even to have surprised the secret of one of them was a signal victory.

He looked carefully into the aperture, wondering what new attempt upon his life its contents would betray.

It appeared that the pressure of his foot upon the mat had set in motion a lever which had withdrawn a bolt at the end of the trough nearest to the bath. The explanation flashed upon him at once; the bottom of the bath was now held in its place by the frailest of supports sufficient to sustain the weight of the water, and had in fact become simply a trap-door. He resolved to test this, and leaning over the edge of the bath struck the bottom a heavy blow with his fist. There was another click, a rush of water, and the sheet of tin gave way and disappeared with a loud, echoing rattle, laying bare a smooth shaft which seemed to go right down to the cellars of the house. As he leant over he could feel cool air upon his face. The discovery was unnerving, but there was a great exultation in it. Carefully skirting the pit he went to the window and looked out. The window was barred outside, but he could see a large and shady garden full of fine trees and pleasant lawns, as peaceful a place as a man might care to walk in. He resolved to open the window and inhale the morning air with its scents from all the lavender and wall-flowers below.

He had just unfastened the catch and was about to push up the frame when he stopped suddenly. To open a window

was so ordinary and simple a thing that he had forgotten his caution. After some consideration he raised it very slowly, carefully avoiding the open space between the sill and the rising window. It was well that he did so, for when he had raised it some two feet it broke away from his hands and fell back into its place with a heavy clang. Had his hand or fingers been beneath they would have been very badly crushed if not entirely amputated. He had half expected this to happen and it did not startle him very much, so with a superior smile—for he was growing very confident—he took up a light bedroom chair and smashed the glass, letting the delightful air stream into the room.

When he had enjoyed it for a time he went cautiously downstairs into the hall. The clock was striking eight as he came down the stairs, and as the last note died away a card made its appearance on the top, bearing the following legend:—"BREAKFAST. SECOND DAY. Will be served in number five on the lower floor. Water may be boiled and tea made without any danger!"

This announcement seemed to promise a truce, and he went carefully down to the passage where on the first night he had supped. He passed the room with the piano, the door standing open as he had left it, and a faint smell of gunpowder still hanging in the air. Number five was comfortably appointed, and the materials for breakfast were upon a table by the window. When he had finished an excellent meal, which was considerably enlivened by the graceful dancing of a penny roll to strains of music which proceeded from an ostensible box of sardines, it was close upon nine. As the hour struck there was a whirring, humming noise, and from an aperture which opened in the wall protruded the mouth of a large metal trumpet. Aylmer rightly concluded that the instrument was connected with a phonograph. It gave him the following message in jerky, metallic accents:—"Mr. Bullo presents his compliments to Mr. Facinorous, and begs to inform him that he is free to walk in the garden for an hour unmolested. Before ten strikes Mr. Facinorous must be back

in the house, or the door will close and the wager be lost!"

A second after the instrument had made an end of speaking, and while the trumpet was slowly going back into the wall, the window, together with the space of wall beneath it, swung open in the manner of a door, and the garden, full of scents and brilliant as a pane of stained glass, lay open for him to walk in. It was inexpressible joy to walk in the garden. As his feet trod the sweet grass of the lawns, and he heard the summer wind dealing delicately with the leaves of the elms, he wept tears of pure relief. Every sunbeam was a smiling ray of hope, he felt sure that before long he would hold Audrey in his arms. There was something of her in every pleasant aspect of the garden. The house itself, seen through the trees, wore such a comfortable presence, and seemed to have such good pride of itself that he would not believe it could be sinister. His body alone remembered. The chatter of the birds seemed to laugh at fear and to dispel it. He consulted his watch frequently in order that he might not be late, and when it showed five minutes to the hour he entered through the opening in the wall. As the gong of the clock beat out ten the window swung into its place, and he was a prisoner again.

The problem before him was how should he spend his time. It would be madness to explore the house, and yet did he remain still in one room it was almost certain that Mr. Bullo would have provided for the contingency. It was idle to suppose that he would be allowed to avoid danger in that way. He resolved after much consideration to go back to the bedroom. He imagined that he had, in all probability, unmasked its worst horrors, and that he would be safer there than anywhere else. When he came into the hall he saw his stick still in the rack, and conceiving that it might be useful he took it out. The clip turned under his hand, endeavouring to repeat the blow which had assailed him on the first evening. This time, however, he was well prepared and easily prevented a *contretemps*. He went slowly and quietly up the stairs, and when he was a yard or two from

the door he stopped, suddenly arrested by the sound of some one moving about the room. The door was half open, and tightly grasping his stick he peeped in. An extraordinary sight met his eyes. From the pit in the centre of the bath projected the top of a steel ladder, and busied at the mantelpiece, with his back to Aylmer, was little Mr. Willy. Aylmer realised that he had found the engineer in the very act of preparing a new trap, and that it was of great importance that he should not himself be seen. Mr. Willy had a bag of tools, and taking a spanner from it he began to unscrew a bolt at the corner of the great mirror which was over the mantel. When he had taken out two screws the glass swung open on hinges, revealing a cupboard in the wall. In the centre of this space, which was entirely filled with machinery, was a large circle of polished steel from which projected four tubes like gun barrels, which he noticed pointed directly at the pillow of the bed. When he had carefully oiled and cleaned the bars and wheels Mr. Willy went again to the tool basket and took from it a brown-paper parcel. Untying the string, he disclosed four rods of dull steel, each about a foot long and with arrow-heads of the same metal. Taking a dart the engineer rammed it into one of the tubes which projected from the disc, obviously compressing a spring as he did so. When only the head of the dart was visible there was the sound of a catch falling into its rest, a half revolution of the wheels below, and the missile remained in its place.

When he had loaded each of the four tubes in this way the engineer took out a large key. In the corner of the aperture there was a clock face, and moving a finger on an index dial to the hour of two, he wound up the machinery. Then, with a little chuckle of satisfaction, he swung the mirror back into its place, and gathering up his tools slowly disappeared into the shaft. Aylmer advanced into the room as Mr. Willy's head went down out of sight, and though he did not dare to peer into the pit, he could hear the engineer moving in it like a rabbit in its hole. He realised the ingenuity of the hellish



"BUSIED AT THE MANTELPIECE, WITH HIS BACK TO AYLMER, WAS LITTLE MR. WILLY"

device at once. At two o'clock in the morning, when in the ordinary course of events he would have been peacefully sleeping, the mirror would swing noiselessly aside and the heavy javelins would be discharged at his defenceless form. His luck was stupendous, for had he not actually seen the preparations no power on earth could have prevented his death.

It was a new idea to think that Mr. Willy, and possibly also Mr. Bullo, were present superintending the progress of their experiment in person, and it was not a pleasant one. For aught he knew

his every action was being scrutinised, his every precaution noted and provided for. Still, there was but a day and a-half more to be endured, and he was warned against what he expected would prove to be the greatest peril of the night. The afternoon passed entirely without incident. He did not go into any of the other rooms until eight, when a card on the clock in the hall informed him that dinner was served in a room upon the first floor.

He found the apartment without difficulty, a handsome panelled place with a ceiling of oaken beams. It was

the finest room he had yet seen in Lever Lodge, a kind of studio one might have supposed, or perhaps designed for the game of billiards. A small round table was spread with cold viands, and he sat down to it with appetite. He wondered if Mr. Bullo had arranged any pleasantry with the table furniture. So far all his meals had been the scene of some small and harmless mechanical joke. Accordingly when a large willow pattern dish ran away with a handsome silver table-spoon, he laughed merrily and appreciated to the full this practical illustration of the nursery rhyme. It was, he thought, a kindly humour of Mr. Bullo's, and he laughed again to find himself playing the part of the Little Dog in the childish drama. His amusement was short-lived. The chair which he was occupying was one of those "study chairs" in which the seat is supported by a screw which allows it to revolve at the pleasure of the occupant. He had tried it carefully before sitting in it, and had examined it all over for something suspicious, finding nothing in it that was untoward.

As he was reaching over the table for a cigarette he found himself wrenched suddenly round, and spinning with inconceivable rapidity, the chair rushed up towards the ceiling. The unexpectedness of the whole thing paralysed his forces, and his head was within a foot of a big beam and in a second more would have collided violently with it, when he leapt from the chair and fell. He was thrown with tremendous force full on to the table, completely smashing the woodwork, and he sank, stunned and giddy, among the *débris* of the dinner, and bleeding from half-a-dozen cuts.

He made desperate efforts to keep a clear brain, but it was impossible, and in a few seconds, he entirely lost consciousness. It was hours afterwards when his senses came back to him, and, full of pain, he crawled away from the wreck around. His watch showed him that it was three o'clock in the morning, so that he must have been lying motionless where he had fallen for some six hours. Every bone in his body made protest as he moved. The wounds upon his hands throbbed painfully, and the burn upon his shoulder

began to trouble him again. At all costs he felt that he must sleep, and, desperate of consequences, he sought his bedroom. When he entered, he saw that the mirror was hanging out from the wall and that the tubes upon the disc were empty. He turned at once to the bed and found, as he had expected, that the darts had been fired. Three of them had penetrated deep into the pillow, and a fourth was buried in the mattress and had only been stopped by the iron of the bedstead beneath.

He was in too parlous a state both of mind and body to care much what happened, and throwing himself upon the end of the bed, he sank into a heavy stupor, in which even the fear of that fearful house could find no part.

THE LAST DAY.

Once more the morning came with all its summer splendour, and once more it found Aylmer more hopeful than he had been the night before. He noticed, nevertheless, that his hands shook very much, and he started at every trivial sound. He also found that he had a curious disinclination, a physical disinclination, to touch anything. His hand, stretched out to grasp the bed-rail or a chair, drew itself back without any order from his brain.

In going through the hall on his way to breakfast, he found a letter in the box upon the front door. It was an ordinary letter from the outside world, and he had never been so pleased with a postmark in his life before. It was addressed to "Aylmer Facinorious," and was in the handwriting of Mr. Bullo. It ran:—

MY DEAR FACINORIOUS,—Only one day remains to you, and at twelve o'clock to-night I hope to hand you a little cheque that we know of. Till then be brave, and believe me I have no more sincere wish than that you will be perfectly successful. I must, however, warn you that—as you will no doubt expect—this last day will be the time of greatest trial, of most imminent danger. Also, if you will allow me to give you a hint, I would advise you not to stay too long in any one place.

BULLO.

After breakfast Aylmer was afforded the opportunity of a walk in the garden, and then, as the door in the wall closed on him, began the last terrible hours of the ordeal.

After the plain warning of the lette

he did not dare to remain in the breakfast room, and yet to move about seemed almost equally foolhardy.

It was then that all his confidence finally left him, and he could call no manhood into his brain. He felt that all his former escapes had been vain, that the last act in the drama was at hand, and that the very walls would fall in upon him and crush him rather than let him escape.

His face began to change quickly as the overmastering horror of his position left his brain and went for the first time into his blood. He crept about the house like a hunted creature, tapping the walls and doors with tremulous crooked fingers and laughing softly to himself. A sick thirst began to sand his throat, and his eyes to lose their human look. The letter had utterly unmanned him. With the suddenness of a blow, the terrible strain of the last two days had now its swift effect. He became a piteous, timid thing but little resembling a man as he stole softly round the house. Deep furrows showed themselves in his grey face, his lips scrabbled meaninglessly.

As the hours went on he moved faster and faster, finding it impossible to remain still for a moment. Ever and again he would howl like an animal and beat upon the walls, careless of results. Nothing whatever happened. No single occurrence broke the monotony of fear. About eleven o'clock, when he knew that his trial would last but another hour, his sanity left him. He felt sure that he had but a few minutes to live, that some swift secret stroke would destroy him before midnight.

He ran from lighted room to lighted room, as if something were pursuing him, whimpering as he ran. Mr. Bullo faded from his mind, and he only knew that he was afraid.

The millionaire had indeed inflicted his last and most fearful horror. There were no more traps in the house, the machinery was all out of gear and the dynamo in the engine-house was stopped and cold. The place was safe for a little child to ramble in, but fear had come to it more surely and completely than before.

When Mr. Bullo and Mr. Willy opened the front door at midnight, they found Aylmer lying motionless upon the floor of the hall.

* * * *

Thus ends the tale told me by the young gentleman in the house upon the moor, but as the acquaintance begun in so casual a manner has since ripened into a firm friendship, it needs that I



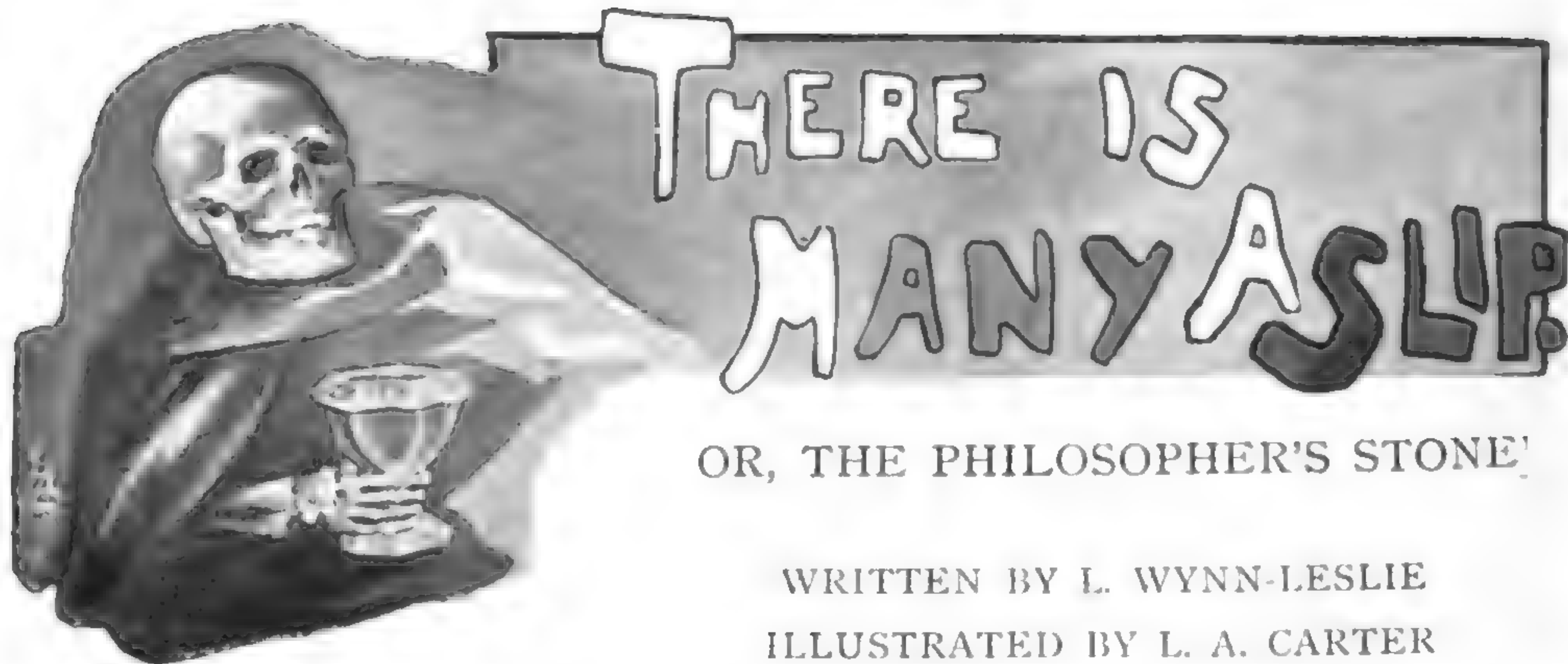
"HE RAN FROM LIGHTED ROOM TO LIGHTED ROOM"

say another word or two. Aylmer stayed another fortnight in the lonely house, until his nerves had recovered tone, and Audrey, who was staying at Princes Town—I found her to be the dearest girl—visited him every day. At the end of that time they were married, and both myself and my collaborateur were invited to the wedding, which was a pleasing function. When Aylmer's rich relations found that he had twenty thousand pounds, many of them died and left him large sums, so that he is now very rich indeed. The failure of a famous bank unfortunately deprived Mr. Bullo of his vast wealth. Hearing of this, Aylmer very kindly offered him the position of gatekeeper

at Compton, his country house in Hertfordshire. Bullo gladly accepted, and his mechanical pig George, which can sing a comic song in the broadest Hertfordshire, is extremely popular with all the country side, and a never-failing draw at the village penny readings. Bullo is never tired of relating how when the Prince was shooting in the neighbourhood he asked to see George, the mechanical pig, and expressed himself as pleased with the merry toy.

Of Mr. Willy I can say nothing that is good. He has a small competence, and lives in Bristol, where he spends all his time in the society of a fair florist, who is addicted to the vice of gambling. I do not wish to speak of him.





WRITTEN BY L. WYNN-LESLIE

ILLUSTRATED BY L. A. CARTER

DARK, dank and dismal was the night of the storm that raged over London, and did such great damage to the city, in the year of our Lord 1703. On that memorable night stacks of chimneys were flung into the streets below, houses were stripped of their roofs, and tiles dashed to fragments, or driven deep into the earth, to the great danger of any belated citizen.

It was evening. The wind blew in fitful gusts that moaned among the projecting gables of the houses, and hissed through winding alleys. Solid squadrons of cloud marched sullenly across a lurid sky; the atmosphere was charged with a premonition of storm—that feeling of anxious unrest always noticeable before any grand convulsion of the elements. On the river, the flood-tide meeting the stream, struggled round the slimy, scum-coated piers of old London Bridge, and eddied away in long pallid streaks of foam.

Now, old London Bridge was like a street, being covered from bank to bank with houses, and on one side, even a church. Each end of the bridge was guarded by an arched gateway, ornamented with felons' heads, ghastly and grim, stuck upon long iron spikes. As building space upon the bridge was of necessity very limited, the massive stone piers were in some cases utilised, having

cellars and chambers built in the great width of the masonry.

This street was deserted. The lights which glimmered in the windows, or shot into the gloom through cracks of the rotting shutters only served to make the darkness more apparent. The bridge-folk were safe within doors, for that was the night of the Great Storm, long portended.

Yet no! Some one was still abroad.

The cobbles of the narrow roadway rang with the tread of hurrying feet; the walls echoed stamp for stamp. A person close-mantled hastened past overhanging houses and gloomy doors, glancing neither right nor left, until at last he stopped at a portal gloomier than the rest. The man unlocked the iron-studded door, and entered a passage dimly lit by a spluttering lamp which made the old oak wainscoting shine dully. He threw off his cloak, disclosing (if any intruder had been there to see) a hideously deformed body, all ugliness and misproportion. The head was huddled between unequally elevated shoulders, the back was humped, and the arms long and huge, whilst the features were coarse and sullen. This was the alchemist's dwarf—his dog, his dumb slave.

Taking the lantern, the dwarf descended a narrow flight of stairs, which creaked as he trod the worm-eaten boards. From the bottom of this flight

he carefully threaded his way among a number of barrels and crates of merchandise to the opposite wall, where at the touch of some concealed spring a block of stone slid back, revealing a spiral stairway. He crept down the rough steps until his further progress was barred by an iron door at which he rapped.

After waiting for some minutes, he knocked again, louder than before, this time succeeding in gaining some response from within. A rusty bolt grated back, a chain clanked, and the dwarf was admitted by an old and venerable man.

"You ha' come at last, then?" he said. "You disturbed me. You ha' brought the chemical I bade you? 'Tis well." The old man took the chemical, and returned to his work once more.

The dwarf closed and bolted the door again securely. The room in which he stood merits some description, but, first, perhaps it may be best to introduce its presiding genius. He was clad in a heavy robe of black cloth, drawn in at the waist by a girdle. His long white hair swept disordered over knit brows, of which the many lines and furrows proclaimed a life dedicated to over-much study, and his tall lean figure was bent with stooping over manuscript or crucible, yet was still noble and commanding. But his deep-set eyes ever wore an apprehensive look, a wild expression of fear, as if some lurking danger was ever at his elbow. Such then, briefly, was Doctor Price, the Alchemist. The world knew little about him. The people on the bridge called him Wizard, and passed his habitation as far away as the narrowness of the road allowed. He seldom left his sombre hermitage, then only at night and alone.

The laboratory, the very atmosphere of which breathed heavy of alchemy, was very small, for indeed it was but a cell in the pier, and below the water-level when the tide was in full flood. At the time when the dwarf entered, the sole illumination was the flickering light of a furnace, over which hung a large retort. That end of the chamber was filled with a ruddy glow, the many recesses and corners being left in almost total darkness. Near the furnace a

shelved recess was filled with test-tubes, cucurbites, phials, and all the various paraphernalia appertaining to the alchemic art. On shelves extending to the low vaulted roof were bottles of many chemicals. To the immediate right of the fire stood a heavy oaken table, black with age, and polished by constant use; by it a large celestial globe reflected, glimmer for glimmer, the furnace glow. From a beam overhead a skeleton was dangling, the flickering light playing a gruesome hide-and-seek among its polished bones. A brazier fantastically wrought was suspended from its ankles by three chains, whilst the rough walls of the vault were ornamented with huge stuffed lizards, vampires with wings outspread, crocodiles, and other loathsome beasts. The door was draped with black curtains, which rustled mysteriously when touched. Over it, with bony heels resting on the lintel, squatted another skeleton with outstretched arms. Above, in hideous mockery, was blazoned the one word, "BENEDICITE."

This was the cell in which the old alchemist toiled—had toiled away his lifetime—and would continue to toil until he found at last that *Lapis Philosophorum* for which he searched, or in the meantime died of the river-damps that were eating fast into his bones.

Doctor Price had bent again over his work; the dwarf retreated to his closet, a sort of small oubliette still lower than the laboratory. The crystal powder which his servant had just brought was a last resort, and the result meant success, or ruin utter and complete. He was wrought up to the highest pitch, his muscles quivered, his breath came and went in short, sharp gasps. The climax of a life was nearly reached.

Two hours later the old man still strained over the retort which contained all his hopes. "In a few minutes—in a little hour, at most," he moaned, as he watched intensely. Suddenly he bent yet closer to the vessel with a cry of joy: "At last! At last, it changes!"

The liquid was indeed undergoing a transformation. It had been dull and clouded; now it slowly, almost imperceptibly, cleared. The alchemist turned to one of the ponderous tomes



" TURNED TO ONE OF THE FONDEROUS TOMES BESIDE HIM "

on the table beside him, following with bony forefinger some mystic formulæ. In time the contents of the retort became tinged with colour, which rapidly developed into a full, warm red. The climax was almost attained! The old man clung to the table for support, his features twitching violently, a clammy sweat upon his forehead. When at last a precipitate collected at the bottom of the retort, a hoarse cry broke from his dry lips, for his life-work was that night achieved.

The prize was won. The alchemist staggered to the door, for he knew that until the vessel cooled with the dying of the fire there was nothing further to be done. Stumbling up the spiral stairways, he rushed out into the street, thinking to calm himself in the cool night air.

It was raining heavily; the wind went bursting between the buildings in sudden, boisterous gusts. Doctor Price heeded them not, however, but strode on, only drawing his mantle closer round him. The strife of the elements suited his own excited mood. Yea, he would have danced for very joy, but that his old limbs refused the task.

The aim of his life; the end to which he had laboured night and day; the grand substance for which hundreds of other men from the earliest times had sought, and vainly sought, had been at last discovered—and by *him*. The weary hours of study and research, the hours of stooping over crucibles, the anguish of repeated failure—what were they to him now? Memories, nothing more! What mattered it that his prime was past? Would he not have gold to cheer his old age? Gold, good red gold, to buy the world, the flesh, or the devil; aye, and Heaven too, for he was a good Catholic. He would turn everything into gold, and revolutionise the world. The very spears of light from the windows seemed to him to be bars of gold; the raindrops as they caught the rays seemed molten gold; the gutter-spouts dripped gold; the flag-stones gleamed gold; the gusts of wind howled "Gold, gold, gold."

His brain was aflame! With joy he was distraught, and he strode forward, neither heeding nor caring the direction

he might take, when the abrupt cessation of all noise and buffeting of the wind aroused him. Peering into the darkness for some clue as to his whereabouts he perceived that his wanderings had brought him far from home.

The lull was short-lived. It was but the calm before the tempest that with a sudden roar burst over the city. Then steeples rocked, and stacks of chimneys were thrown down, windows burst in, and doors dashed open. Then wives clung to husbands in their beds, and children screamed aloud in terror. The livid sky was rent by fiery lightning that threatened the high edifices of the town, and the continuous thunder shook the very foundations of the earth. During that, the most violent storm that ever raged over our city of London, roofs were ripped off, trees torn up, and some of the older houses were even razed to the ground.

Doctor Price was thrown off his legs into a deep doorway by the first blast, and very fortunately so as it happened, for a shower of tiles from the house-top would otherwise certainly have killed him. He lay as one dead for a short time, but on recovering and finding himself the worse only by a few bruises, he made his way towards the bridge, seeing nothing of the havoc going on around him, and marvellously escaping all danger. The river was white as beaten cream; foam-capped waves dashed headlong against the bridge, drenching it with spray. Occasionally a barge torn from its moorings was dimly visible through clouds of hurtling spume and driving sheets of rain, like some uneasy shade, driven on in the toils of the storm to its inevitable destruction.

Doctor Price became fearful for his life as he stumbled on through piles of rubbish that encumbered the ground. But defending his face with his arm, and seeking what little protection there might be from the walls beside which he groped, the old man at last reached his house, bruised and bleeding, almost prostrate with fatigue. The memory alone of what awaited him below buoyed him up, and a measure of brandy poured out in trembling haste lent renewed vigour to his body for a time.

The laboratory, when he entered it, was in darkness, so the alchemist felt his way to the hanging brazier, as he went, kicking a skull which rolled chattering against the flag-stones. The little vault by the pale light of the skeleton-suspended brazier looked even weirder than before. The erstwhile jumping furnace-flames had at least cast a ruddy glow over the laboratory, but the present wan illumination gave it the appearance of a chamber of death. Even here penetrated the din of the tempest without. The shriek of the gale, and the mad waves dashing upon the pier made it tremble, and the timbers creak.

The retort, now cool, was half-filled with a dull purplish powder, and some red liquid. The old alchemist drained away the fluid part into a beaker, afterwards pouring with scrupulous care the powder—the Philosopher's Stone—into a shallow earthenware basin, the rim of which he kissed with a reverence that was almost blasphemy ere he put it down, and bathed his hand in it, letting it trickle through his greedy, trembling fingers.

Then suddenly a change swept over him—he lost all self-control. Standing erect before the furnace-altar, with upraised arms and staring eyes, he shouted, "Scream on, ye winds! Dash on, ye waves! With all your vaunted power ye cannot harm me here. Ye cannot break the solid rock, neither can ye upheave the mountain. I'm safe within my cell, I and my secret—my secret and I! A fit night this for such a grand discovery. Gold—Ha, ha, ha, ha! Gold! Gold! . . . Heaven thunders forth my victory, and groaning Hell makes wild reply. The world's wealth is within my grasp—the Philosopher's Stone is mine! Ha, ha, ha!"

He rocked himself wildly, shaking his clenched fists above his head. His frenzied peals of terrible laughter rang through the vaulted chamber. Such is success: he was mad.

"Rain on, ye rain! Flash on, ye levin! Roll on, ye thunders! 'Tis a worthy salvo to a grand discovery. Gold—all, all is gold! The walls are gold, the floor is gold, those long-dead bones are gold. I'll swear they

are gold! Look! Look, you leaping, gleaming devils, I can see vistas of gold—I can see a city of gold; in the streets piles of gold; men dressed in cloth of gold; but—they are all starving—starving. . . . Eh? Eh? . . . What does it mean? Starving!" The old man tottered and fell, and lay still upon the cold, damp stones. In falling, he struck with his elbow a large gong. The hollow note reverberated through the laboratory, and the dwarf appeared through the opening in the floor from his closet below.

He sprang to his master's side, and after a weary time succeeded in restoring him to consciousness. Doctor Price stared about him, dazed for a moment, until recollection gleamed from his dull eyes.

"Dwarf," he whispered, coughing up a clot of blood, "Dwarf, I am rich—rich beyond all understanding, and you shall be rich, too. Yea, I am rich, rich, rich, and you have always been faithful unto me. I saw heaps of gold—" He struggled to his feet. "Eh? Eh?" he mumbled, "Where is it all?" Then he caught sight of his powder. "Begone, you crawling deformity," he shrieked in a passion; "why do you stand shivering there when I have ordered you a thousand times to bring me those kegs of iron?"

The tempest without raged more grievously than ever; the very bridge quaked. Ah yes! and whilst the old man had lain unconscious, something had cracked in the roof. He did not note an ominous sound like the ticking of some great great gruesome clock—Drip—drip—drip. So!

Taking a melting-pot, Doctor Price poured into it some scraps of metal that the dwarf had already brought. To this he added a carefully-measured quantity of the *Lapis Philosophorum*. The dwarf, in the meanwhile, fanned the furnace into a vigorous blaze, until his master motioned him away as he placed the pot among the flames. Then, heedless of smoke or heat, the alchemist bent over the vessel with no thought for anything but his task. For a full hour he watched it thus, scarce a muscle moving, save occasionally when he stirred the seething mass, or turned to

blow the fire to a greater heat. He heard nothing of the creaking beams overhead, nothing of the slowly-chafing stones, nothing of Death, forcing its cruel fingers through the crannies of the straining roof.

Suddenly he uttered a gasping, sobbing cry, "At last! *It changes!* It is GOLD!"

Yes, indeed, the secret of the transmutation of metals, which had baffled the chemists and wise men of all ages, was solved that night in the tiny laboratory hid there in a pier of old London Bridge. Yet, even at that supreme moment of success, the alchemist caught the sound of fast-trickling water. He sprang up too late to plug the hole. There was a grinding crash, and a deluge of water gushed in through a yawning aperture, open to wind and wave. The torrent drowned the furnace instantly, filling the vault with scalding steam. Doctor Price was driven back by the first rush of water, but strove frantically to reach, not the gold, but his wondrous powder. In vain! Chaos held possession of that lonely cell. Stone after stone fell in; the mad wind shrieked exultant through the breach. The river-waters, rushing down the trap-opening, flung back the poor terror-stricken dwarf, who strained up the crazy ladder calling piteously for his master's aid. The alchemist, driven backwards to the same abyss, made frantic efforts to reach the iron door in safety. Clutching madly at anything—at nothing—in his agony, he was swept downwards through the

hatch, screaming "My Gold! My Gold!"

* * * *

There can be little more to add.

The habitation of Doctor Price was no longer an object of fear to the bridge-folk. Its secrets were disclosed; the wizard himself had departed, no one knew whither, in the storm. The privacy of the flooded laboratory was profaned by the inquisitive watermen, who gazed through the ragged breach and wondered, and probed as far as they could reach with their long boat-hooks, looking with horror upon the skull and shoulder-girdle of the skeleton that still hung from the roof, the turbid Thames waters rippling among its ribs.

But what of Doctor Price himself?

There he lay in the little oubliette, with his dwarf—and his secret. It yet remains for some other one to wring from Nature that secret by which base metals may be turned to gold. Thus was lost to the world a wondrous discovery; a discovery that would have killed all poverty and want, a discovery that would have made all men rich; a discovery that would have thrust gold into the hands of men——

But hold—what am I saying?

The ghost of the dead rises up, and whispers: "*They are starving! They are all starving!*"

Our beloved gold would then be but dross. Then brass and lead and iron would be the valued metals. And then? Why then would spring into existence men who would labour their lives away striving to make gold—lead!





THE LAST SKIPPER OF THE "LAPWING"

WRITTEN BY ARTHUR H. HENDERSON
ILLUSTRATED BY J. SYDNEY ALDRIDGE

MASTER wanted for a 1,000-ton steamer. Immediate employment offered. Knowledge of China Seas indispensable. No investment necessary. Apply at once, with testimonials, to Messrs. Mavis, Gray and Co., Hong Kong."

The above advertisement used to appear with more or less regularity in the columns of the *China Mail* every three or four months. At first a single insertion appeared sufficient, but as time went on it might sometimes be noticed running for several consecutive numbers. After a while most of the regular Hongkong skippers grew to know to what ship it referred. Still, it must have been constantly answered by outsiders from other ships, or other trades. These, however, can never have retained their command for long, for the advertisement invariably re-appeared after an interval to announce that the "Lapwing" was again without a master. There was no doubt she was a most unpopular ship. Yet it was difficult to ascertain the cause. Most people, if asked, said they could not understand it. A few looked as if they could tell

something if they chose. No one seemed to have any definite knowledge—or if they had they kept it to themselves.

Now I have learnt the reason. Now I understand why the command of that vessel passed from man to man till the phrase, "skipper of the 'Lapwing,'" raised a smile on Hongkong lips. Now I know not only that it is a fact that every captain, save two, left that ship after the first round voyage in her—and of the two exceptions one was washed overboard in a typhoon, and the other committed suicide—but, also, I know the reason why!

Some months ago, Jack Forrester and I ran up against each other most unexpectedly in old Ambrose's Store at Hongkong—a noted gathering-place for officers of the merchant vessels trading to and from the port. We had been friends ever since we were boys, and, consequently, we hailed each other with genuine delight after the years that had elapsed since our last meeting. I was, by this time, first officer of one of the Indian mail boats then running between Hongkong and Calcutta, and he had recently been master of a China coaster

that plied mainly between Shanghai and the southern ports.

When the war broke out between China and Japan his owners promptly sold their vessel at a good price to the Japanese, and he lost his berth. Times were bad, and he had not yet succeeded in getting another ship—so he told me as we sat over our drinks at the rough store table. Then we talked of many things: of the happy days spent as cadets together in the dear old training ship on the Mersey; of apprentice days round the Horn in a 'Frisco wheat ship; of vessels that we had sailed in, and vessels that we had seen from afar; of Board of Trade examinations, and the long, weary struggle up the ladder of a sailor's profession. From that the conversation turned back again to homes in England, and I asked him if he was married.

"No," he answered, with a sudden flush on his bronzed face, "but I am engaged."

"My best congratulations, old fellow"—I was beginning conventionally, when he cut me short with abruptness.

"Her name is Jessie Collier, and she is governess in the family of an English merchant named Price at Shanghai," he said, in rather troubled tones. "And, of course, I think her the sweetest girl on earth, Frank. But in another three months the family are returning to England. Unless I can get a berth before then, and one, moreover, which will enable me to marry her and take her with me, she will have to go back with the Prices. The thought of it is worrying me badly."

Just at that moment, before I could reply, someone, quite by chance, flung down on the table beside us the current copy of the *China Mail*. Jack picked it up carelessly, and there was the advertisement about the "Lapwing" staring him straight in the face. He pounced on it eagerly with a quick exclamation. In five minutes he had departed unceremoniously, leaving me to cut the fatal slip out of the paper and speculate idly on its real meaning. I have that very cutting in my possession still.

Two hours later I met him again in the street. He was radiant with delight. He had gone direct from Ambrose's

Store to the office of Messrs. Mavis, Gray & Co., to apply for the post, and had obtained it on the spot.

It was in vain that I hinted, at first slightly, and then, after a while, more plainly, that he ought not to have been so precipitate. That the ship might not perhaps be a desirable one. That if it was the first-class berth that he declared it to be, it was at least peculiar there should have been such an evident absence of competition for it. Growing more explicit, I warned him that there were curious rumours afloat; that more than one skipper had left the "Lapwing" in the greatest hurry. That none had ever remained, so it was said, more than three months in her, and that although, strangely enough, the same did not apply to the crew, yet the high wages offered by Messrs. Mavis, Gray & Co., to the masters of their desirable 1,000-ton steamer, invariably proved of no use in retaining their services for any lengthy period. It was even whispered that the bad end of her first skipper—he who had committed suicide—had something to do with the aversion felt by his successors for their vessel.

But Jack Forrester scoffed at the idea, and ridiculed my indefinite warnings. He laughingly declared that it would take more than all the ghosts of all the skippers that had ever had her, to prevent his accepting the command of the "Lapwing" on the terms offered by the owners. Never, he averred, had such a stroke of luck turned up so opportunely. Mr. Mavis, the senior partner of the firm, had been so pleased with Jack's testimonials that the latter had ventured to ask him whether, after the first voyage, he might be allowed to take a wife with him. And the tall, courteous old owner, looking gravely at his new captain from under his bushy, grey eyebrows, had replied, after a momentary hesitation, that he thought there would be no objection—provided, of course, he remained in command when the time for the second voyage came.

Which highly significant proviso—as I thought it—Jack treated as merely the ordinary caution of a shipowner's business.

And, forthwith, we went off to have a



"TWO HOURS LATER I MET HIM AGAIN IN THE STREET. HE WAS RADIANT WITH DELIGHT"

look at the steamer. She was lying abreast of the lower part of the town on the far side of the Fairway Channel, engaged in taking on board bunker coal from a large lighter alongside. Consequently, everything was plentifully besprinkled with coal dust. Her two pole masts were grimy in the extreme, and recent brine-whitened patches on her funnel were rapidly assuming a more sooty colour. Her iron decks, in places, were distinctly rusty. But she was not at all a bad ship of her kind. Built on the Tyne about five years earlier, she was a steel boat with triple expansion engines, and many modern improvements. One peculiarity of her construction was that all the berths for the officers and engineers, as well as their mess room and the steward's pantry, were amidships; the skipper's cabin and a tiny saloon being situated aft by themselves. This arrangement seemed to me rather unusual, and I drew Jack's attention to it.

"Oh—that does not matter," he answered promptly, "I always sleep in the chart room under the bridge at sea, so as to be available at once in case of necessity."

"You won't be able to do that aboard this 'ere ship, sir," commented the mate, who was showing his new skipper round. "There ain't no proper chart room so to speak. All the chart room we 'as is a bit of a table and some drawers at the back o' the wheel'ouse." And this fact was speedily confirmed on investigation.

"The cap'n allus 'as to sleep aft," continued the mate, who struck me as wishing to emphasise the fact. "Bit lonesome at times I'm thinkin." And the speaker blinked queerly in the sunlight.

Isaac Smerton, as the mate called himself, was a rough battered looking individual, one of those men who never rise above subordinate rank, but, sturdy and hardworking, are content with the lesser responsibilities of life. A splendid seaman in his uncouth way who had voyaged in almost every corner of the globe—from Mauritius to Honolulu, from Alaska to the Cape—he had, so he told us, come out with the "Lapwing" from England on her maiden trip, and remained in her ever since.

"Aye, she ain't such a bad boat," he opined slowly, "though not the sort o' craft as you'd make a yacht of. A bit too much given to rollin' when she ain't full that's what she is; and contrary-like she pulls strong on 'er 'elm when deep. But she don't seem to suit her skippers, them as lives down aft. Lord! what a 'eap I've 'ad over me. 'Bout full moon 'tis mostly as they gets uneasy too."

"Full moon!" exclaimed Jack in surprise. "Why what has that got to do with it?"

"Can't say, sir, I'm sure," answered the other shrugging his shoulders and looking his questioner straight between the eyes. "Never did rightly understand it myself. But 'tis a fact for all that. Maybe you'll find out before long sir," he added rather significantly.

"I wonder they have not given you the command," I remarked with some curiosity.

"Wouldn't 'ave it, sir," he replied promptly. "I knows a good berth when I gets it. I'm mate of this 'ere craft and I sleeps 'midships and I'm content like. Mr. Mavis 'e offers me the ship two year ago come next week. 'No thank ye, sir,' I says, 'mate I am and mate I'll stay.' But now I'll just be lookin' after them coolie thieves forrard by your leave, sir."

And, straightway, Mr. Smerton departed in some haste, while from the hubbub that shortly afterwards arose in the bows we judged his presence was not unneeded.

"What does the old fool mean, Jack?" I asked my companion as we went down into the little cabin aft to drink to a prosperous voyage from certain stores abandoned by the last skipper, who had departed—so unkind rumour alleged—without even the formality of getting a discharge.

"I don't know and I don't care," answered the "Lapwing's" new master curtly. Then his honest, sunburnt face flushed slightly as he added:

"I have got to make a home for Jessie in three months' time, you know. So I cannot afford to be too particular. Here is luck to us all three!" he said.

As I put down my glass, after drinking heartily to his toast, I swear that I distinctly heard a low mocking chuckle at

my side. I glanced sharply round the dusty little saloon in astonishment. Of course there was nothing there. I got up and walked to the door. Jack, apparently quite unconscious of it, was overhauling an empty locker. So far as I could see no one was near the companion ladder or by the cabin skylight overhead. Could it have been merely imagination? I suppose it was—and yet?

But my chum speedily cut short my wondering by declaring that he must return ashore to fetch his kit. The ship was to sail almost immediately. And so my visit to his vessel was at an end. And as I went overboard I felt a distinct reluctance to refer to that curious sound. So I didn't.

Both the "Lapwing" and my own ship cleared from Hongkong the same evening. We left just after her, and steaming rapidly seawards, passed her outside the entrance to the harbour. It was my watch, and as I paced the bridge I could see Jack's tall form standing by the binnacle on the other craft. We waved mutual farewells. For my part I thought he was a fool to go. There seemed to me an air of mystery about his ship that puzzled me and which I did not like. But then I had no Jessie Collier to consider. Perhaps, if that had been the case, my point of view would have been different. I have never married yet.

I was back again in Hongkong before many weeks had elapsed, and I enquired at once for the "Lapwing." But she was still away on some round voyage to the Philippines and Java, and there was no news of her. Then I was sent on an intermediate run to Rangoon, and it must have been a good two months later before I found myself opposite Jack Forrester again in a cosy corner of Ambrose's hospitable store. I was just in from Calcutta; he was off next morning for Labuan and the Straits Settlements.

He seemed unusually grave, and at first was very uncommunicative. But after a time he threw himself back in his seat lit a fresh pipe, and told me the whole yarn that follows quietly and thoughtfully. I think it was a relief to him to have some one to talk to about

it whom he could trust. As far as I can remember this is how it ran, more or less in his own words:—

"There is something uncanny, something horrible about that boat of mine, Frank, that baffles me. I never knew what fear was till I joined her, but I think I understand the feeling well enough now. Just about the full moon—as old Smerton hinted in our first interview, do you remember?—the evil things seem to have power to manifest themselves. Evil they certainly must be too! I used to laugh at stories of ghosts and spirits; I do it no longer, I can tell you.

"For some time after leaving Hongkong all went well. Once or twice I thought I heard curious sounds in the cabin for which I could not account; but as I was accustomed to have it all to myself, except when the steward was about at meal times, I put them down to fancy. The night before the moon was full we were steaming through Mindoro Strait on the way to Manilla. The heat all day had been fearful, and the tropical evening had brought no respite, it was close and sultry. The sea was smooth save for a slight oily swell from the northward. A few ghostly gleams of phosphorus broke from the 'Lapwing's' bows as she made her way sluggishly against the set of the current. I had been on the bridge till we were safely past Apo reef, which divides the strait in two, and then shortly before eight-bells, midnight, I went aft to get some sleep. A strange feeling of depression had been creeping over me all day and by this time it had become almost insupportable. My cabin, as I dare say you recollect, has two doors, one in the passage and the other into the little saloon. On this occasion I made straight for my bunk without passing through the latter, and I was in the act of turning up the little swinging lamp when a sudden most unexpected noise made me pause in astonishment.

"Next moment it was repeated. A distinct burst of hoarse laughter rang out boisterously from the saloon itself.

"I confess I was startled. Who on earth could be there at this hour of the night. But then it occurred to me that



"AT THE TABLE WERE SEATED THREE STRANGE FORMS"

the steward must be making free with my whisky, and I flung open the door angrily, intent on giving that gentleman a lesson.

"The words died on my lips. *At the table were seated three strange forms.* The lamp was burning brightly, and shed a vivid light on them; every detail is burnt on my memory. One looked like a Chinaman of the lowest description, a sallow, round-faced specimen, with hideous triangular eyes and a degraded cringe in every movement. Opposite was what appeared to be a burly, red-headed man, in a dirty sailor-blue suit, *minus* a collar, smoking a black clay pipe upside down, the ashes from which strewed a long thick beard. This latter Appearance was wild and uncouth in the extreme; I can hardly describe the impression made on me in words. I can only think of it with a shudder.

"The third Shape was a woman's. It was sitting in my armchair at the head of the table, leaning carelessly backwards. It was the dress that struck me as so extraordinary, for every colour there is seemed to be blended in one hideous glare that made my eyes ache to look at it. It, or rather She, was busy sorting a pack of greasy cards, and her face was hidden behind them. Her hands were white and active.

"I never was so completely taken aback in my life. Everything looked solid and substantial, from the sailor's ragged cap on the floor to the black spirit bottles on the table. And yet the faces made me shiver. On all of them—for the woman was gazing straight at me now with piercing black eyes—was stamped the same fierce expression, the same reckless, abandoned look. One felt there was nothing, however wicked,

such people would not dare; no deed however cruel they might not attempt if it suited them.

"My entrance was greeted with a rude shout.

" 'Here is a partner for you, Nell,' cried the man in a rasping voice. 'You two can take on Ah Fung and me. Whist, mate, that's the game!' And he motioned me imperiously to a seat opposite the woman.

"I suppose I must have taken it mechanically, for I found myself shuffling the cards like a man in a dream. They certainly seemed real enough. I can almost feel the touch of them still.

"The Shape opposite me gave a horrible little laugh.

" 'The usual stakes?' demanded its woman's voice, shrilly.

" 'Aye, that's it,' agreed the other; while the Chinaman rocked backwards and forwards, and peered at me with beady eyes. 'Look ye here, mister; you think you're master of this ship, I reckon. So did others afore ye. But that is where you are all mistaken. There is only one skipper aboard this craft, and that is Me! And I am going to have my way. This ship'—the Thing that was speaking thumped the table furiously till the bottles rang—'has got to be lost—to go to the bottom. Do you understand? May be you have a kind of objection to sinking her. So did some of the others in your shoes; and those are the lucky ones that shifted quietly, I can tell ye. But I'll make a sportsmanlike offer. We'll play for it. The ship's safety shall be the stake; that is a fair game, ain't it? If we wins the rubber, you sinks the ship. If you and Nell there'—with a ghastly leer—'beats us, then the old tub floats. See? Play up, Ah Fung, you son of a pig—your lead!'

"And he kicked his partner under the table till the creature screeched with anger.

"We played that awful game those three Shapes and I. I have the reputation of being rather good at whist. But I do not remember in the slightest how it went that night. All I know is that a sudden fiendish yell of triumph warned me that I had lost. And I became

aware of those horrible mocking faces glaring fixedly into mine.

"An indescribable feeling of terror seized me. I sprang to my feet, scattered the cards in all directions, and rushed madly on deck. Their last threatening chorus rang in my ears:

" 'Lose the ship before We meet you at next full moon, or face Us again if you dare.'

"And its discordant echoes haunted me along the quiet decks, up the bridge ladder, and even while I stood beside the mate, looking mechanically into the glowing binnacle at the restless compass card.

"But I am not going to be scared away from the 'Lapwing.' Neither, of course, am I going to lose her if I can help it. Last full moon we were lying in Batavia harbour, and I confess I spent the nights ashore. But during the next one, in about ten days' time, we shall be at sea. Then I will face it out, and tell you the result when we meet again."

I begged him, with the utmost earnestness, not to be so rash. I urged, I argued, I entreated, and at last I cursed his obstinacy. Then only I learnt the reason of his determination.

"Jessie sails with me this voyage, Frank," he said slowly. "She knows all the story, and has made me promise to go and take her with me. We were married two days ago."

I stared at him in silent surprise, and after that I gave up my attempt to dissuade him. Moreover, when, later on, he introduced me to his young wife, I ceased to wonder. There was that in the girl's clear dark eyes, and sweet, rather wistful face, that made me in some degree realise how a man would risk everything for the sake of keeping her with him.

Besides, in this matter she herself was resolute. If such a girl had ever wished me to do anything for her, I should have done it unquestioning. Alas! none such ever has. And Jessie Forrester had heard her husband's story, and had declared that her place was to face the evil Things at his side, come what might. And she had made Jack, who loved her, reluctantly

acquiesce. Of what use, then, was argument of mine?

They sailed next morning at sunrise, and I watched them go with a dim foreboding, for which I could not account.

One evening, rather more than a week later, my own vessel was steaming rapidly southward towards Singapore. The night was fine, with a light breeze, the sea smooth, and the moon, approaching her full, was bathing everything in a wondrous glory of silver hue. Dinner was over, and the passengers aft were having a dance. It was my watch on deck, and as I paced the upper bridge the waltz music hummed dreamily in my ears. All that day a vague sense of approaching calamity had haunted me, mixed up in some strange fashion with thoughts of the "Lapwing" and her crew. Once that evening I could have sworn I heard Jack's voice calling me. Another time it was as if Jessie's low tones came across the rippling waters in a cry for help. Of course, it was all imagination. The heat in the daytime had been stifling, and I had not been able to get my due share of sleep.

But what was that glare away to the southward? Suddenly, interrupting the music and the laughter on the after deck, a hoarse shout broke from the man on the lookout forward:

"Strange light on the port bow, sir," his voice rang out ominously. Then a minute or two later, "Ship on fire ahead, sir!"

The dancing stopped abruptly. There was a general rush to the side rail. The captain joined me on the bridge, and ordered me to alter the course to bring us close up to the burning vessel. He rang up the engine room to "stand by."

The distance between us lessened rapidly. Soon we were able to distinguish the outline of a steamer lying motionless in the midst of a circle of flame-coloured sea. The fire was bursting out furiously, and mounting upwards till the very sky above was reddened with the glare. As we steamed nearer fresh volumes of flame and smoke could be seen breaking out along her decks, whilst we seemed almost to hear the

fierce crackling of the woodwork and the dull hissing of the flames.

But she appeared to be deserted. There were no signs of life on board.

"Can you make out her name?" said the chief to me, as the sharp "Ting Ting" of the telegraph carried his orders to the engine room to slow down.

I steadied my glass on the canvas wind screen of the bridge, and directed it on the bows of the doomed steamer. Long and earnestly I looked. Then a mist seemed to steal over my eyes as I spelt out the white letters one by one—

"L-A-P-W-I-N-G."

"I shall not go any nearer," said the chief decisively. "Take one of the boats and make sure there is no one on board," he ordered. And the throb of our propeller slowed away and then stopped.

The boat's crew gave way with a will, and we were soon as close to the burning vessel as I dared approach. As it was, the heat of the fire was almost unbearable. We hailed her again and again—no answer. Once indeed my shout seemed to linger curiously, as if it were caught up on board and repeated in derision. But I must have been mistaken. She was low in the water, and from where I stood I could see no living thing on her scorching decks. Her boats had been cleared from the davits and were gone.

I gave the order to return. As the men pulled round we went quite close under the "Lapwing's" stern. Tongues of flame were shooting out all round it and licking hungrily at the unburnt sides. And there, looking out of one of the cabin port holes, I saw a face.

A face such as no honest man should see! A face the likeness of which—please Heaven—I shall never gaze on again! Its weird fiery eyes glared at me with the sinister triumph of evil accomplished at last. A terrible grin played round its white mocking lips. A second only was it there, and then there remained but the darkness of an empty port hole, through which the smoke was creeping.

A deadly fear seized me. I shouted incoherently to the men to row for their lives, and fell back into the sternsheets like a man that is stunned.

From that day to this I have never



"BUT WHAT WAS THAT GLARE AWAY TO THE SOUTHWARD"

seen anyone connected with the illfated "Lapwing." When I reached Calcutta at the conclusion of the voyage, I was transferred on promotion to one of the European going liners. After a while I learnt that the crew of the lost vessel were reported to have taken to their own boats, and to have been picked up by a passing Dutchman previous to our arrival on the scene. From the same source I gathered that the origin of the fire, which was supposed to have commenced in the captain's cabin, was

wrapped in mystery. So far as I know it has never been explained. And though I have made every endeavour to trace my friends the Forresters, as yet my efforts have been in vain.

Now I am to go back to the East again to command a fine new steamer in the China Seas. Perhaps before long I shall grasp Jack's sturdy hand as of old and look into his wife's sweet face once more. Perhaps at last I shall hear the conclusion of the strange weird tale.

Who knows?





WRITTEN BY REGINALD BACCHUS AND RANGER GULL

ILLUSTRATED BY A. WALLIS MILLS



ABOUT a year ago most of the Parisian newspapers contained an obituary notice of Paul Vavin, the art critic.

In the places where people talked about art—indeed, in all the coteries which prided themselves on being a little more cultured than their neighbours—his name and work were known. He had more or less, one might say, invented a new attitude towards pictorial art.

His writings were quite ephemeral, and even now are forgotten; but he had a success of novelty which extended over some months; and a year ago, when he died at Envermeu, his decease excited considerable comment. A very striking personality had possibly something to do with this; for by his personality, even more than by his writings, Vavin had made his impression in Paris. The photographs that were published in several illustrated papers at the time of his death gave no true idea of his appearance. He was one of those people who, to use the slang of the dark room, “do not take well,” and his portraits were always egregious failures. His figure was well known upon the Boulevards. Despite a distinct stoop, he still looked very

tall, his great emaciation doubtless adding to the impression. His face was long and thin, and of an extreme pallor, and there was something repulsive in the hard line of his almost lipless mouth and the undue prominence of his lower jaw. His masses of curly black hair—hair in which there was something irresistibly suggestive of negro blood—only served to accentuate the unhealthy paleness of his complexion. His eyes gave more index to his character and habits of life than did any other feature.

They were large and dark, reminding one of pieces of black glass, and, generally, they were dull and lifeless to a degree that was unnatural. At rare moments they blazed into a light that pointed to but one estimate of his mental condition. In fact, a few weeks before he died his friends and intimates perceived that his continued debaucheries were at last having an abnormal effect upon his temperament. His writing became more fantastic in its views; and the ugly, the grotesque, and the wicked in art began to throw him into that terrible dream glamour which fascinates and possesses so many of the younger generation in France.

Vavin was no more evil in his life



“A VERY STRIKING PERSONALITY

than most of his contemporaries, and no more distinguished in his work. He was a type of the character that results from a morbid and vicious life: and it is only the facts attending his death, which he desired should be made public, that invest him with more interest than twenty other young Parisian decadents one could name.

That he was sincerely, truly penitent, Father Gougi (through whose instrumentality the facts have been made public) vouches for; and though the ordinary man cannot but regard such a sudden, death-bed repentance with some suspicion, the wish that the incidents of Envermeau should be told to his friends seems to point to some spirit of contrition. The horror of such a life as Vavin led was well matched by the horror of what he saw

before he quitted it; for, living an abnormal life, his punishment also was abnormal.

Whether he really saw what he professed to see, or whether his shattered nerves merely presented to his brain a terror which had no existence, it is not within the province of this account to decide. In either case the warning is as strenuous. It is sufficient to say that the story has had the effect of pulling up at least one young French writer, who was rapidly travelling on the way which would have led him to a frightful insanity and a lingering death.

Paul Vavin, at the time the following events occurred, was in the full enjoyment of an easily-earned celebrity. He wrote on art matters for several newspapers; and in his criticisms he found, or professed to find, some fantastic and grotesque meaning in nearly all the work which he reviewed.

This, of itself, would not have been sufficient to command success if it had not been that there was undeniably something in his writings which succeeded in giving the people who read them an uneasy feeling that he might possibly be right. When he found an ugly meaning in a beautiful thing, he was clever enough to invest this theory with some probability; and he accordingly found some fame, and a great deal of money, in providing Parisians with a new sensation. He taught them, in fact, to imagine corruptness. The money he earned at his trade he spent in every vicious indulgence.

One morning in the summer of '97 he went to the offices of a newspaper for which he did a great deal of work, to decide with the editor the subject of his next article. It was about the time that the poster, as an artistic factor in modern life, had become generally recognised. M. Lautrec in France, and the Beggarstiffs in England, had conclusively proved to the public that the poster was to be regarded as a serious endeavour, and all Paris was interested in the subject of “Affiches.” Just at the moment two artists—who worked together in much the same way as Messrs. Pryde and Nicholson—had achieved an extraordinary and triumphant success. Beaugerac and Stein—

for those were the names of the two artists—had made an enormous sensation. Discarding the many-coloured posters of most of their co-workers, they drew only in sombre tints, and with the utmost economy of means. Their posters did not attempt to be pictures, or anything like pictures, and at once the public saw that they were good posters. Stein and Beaugerac neither painted nor drew: they “arranged masses”—that was all.

Strangely enough no journal had as yet been able to obtain an interview with these two men, who consistently declined publicity. It was known that they lived and worked somewhere near the great forest of Arques in Normandy, but that was all. Their views on artistic matters could only be guessed at by their work. Vavin himself had written one or two highly eulogistic notices of their productions, in which he had succeeded in finding out nothing of their personal opinions, and they had declined several requests for interviews. On this particular morning, however, the editor of *Le Vrai Salon* informed him that he had received a letter from Stein which at last acceded to his proposals for an interview, and which asked that M. Vavin, in preference to any other critic, should be sent to visit them.

“Will you undertake this?” he said to him. “The opportunity is one which will not occur again, and will give you the chance of turning out an article which will be very widely read and commented upon. I need hardly say that I am excessively pleased at our success.”

“Certainly I will go,” said Vavin; “nothing will please me better. But, *nom d’une pipe!* where in France is Envermeau?”

“Envermeau,” said the editor, “is a village in Normandy, on the edge of the forest of Arques. It is eight or nine miles inland from Dieppe, and to get there, as far as I can find out, your best way will be to go straight to Dieppe, and then drive to the village. The name of the house is ‘Le Maison Noir.’”

“I go,” said Vavin, “to-morrow. To-day I drink. Come now to Père Santerey’s and taste absinthe, my friend. All Paris is abroad, and if the nasty

yellow sun were put out and the gas lamps lit, I should be even happy. But come—*buvons!*—*déjeuner* will be the better for it.”

They went out together into the glorious sunshine, and sat for an hour under the awning of the Café Llamy, just opposite the great gate of the Louvre. The watering carts had laid all the dust on the white roads, and, despite the sun, the air was delightfully fresh and cool and alive with musical sounds. The little boys with their long-drawn shouts of “La Presse! La Presse!” the merry beat of drums as a company of little blue soldiers went marching by, the tinkling of the ice in the flagons of amber and honey-coloured beer, all went to make up a *mise-en-scène* that had a most gay and joyous influence. M. Varnier, the editor, was a man peculiarly alive to the promptings of colour and sound, and he leant back in his little chair smoking his *caporal* and drinking his beer, intensely enjoying this moment of physical ease.

Vavin looked ghastly in the bright daylight. He resembled some figure at a *bal masqué*, which should only be seen in artificial radiances. As he talked extravagantly to the editor, waving his long bony hands to emphasise his remarks, he attracted a good deal of attention, and his cup of happiness was full when he heard a man, who had come out of the big Magasin du Louvre opposite, say to his wife “Look! there’s Paul Vavin.”

After a time, Varnier went away to *déjeuner*, leaving Vavin, who could not eat, alone. He sat there for another hour, drinking without cessation, and then, his potations having induced in him for an hour or two something almost like the energy of an ordinary man, set out for the Boulevard, where he should see his friends and exchange some of the gossip of the day.

The first person he met was Dotricourt, the perfect boulevardier. Dotricourt was said, in Paris, to be the absolute type of the *flaneur*. He had brought lounging to a fine art, and, fortunately possessed of a moderate income, he loafed happily through life. His knowledge of every one who had done anything was extensive and valuable.

He could tell you something of almost anyone about whom you might be seeking information, and to the journalists of Paris he was a constant and never-failing resource. A creature of good nature and bad company, he was absolutely free from prejudice, and all the time he could spare from the study of life he spent in neglecting its obligations. Withal, although he had never been

standing by a kiosk on the pavement, talking to the girl who was selling newspapers.

When they were seated at the café, Vavin told Dotricourt of his mission the next day, and asked him if he knew anything of Beaugerac or Stein, who they were, and what manner of life they lived. The *flâneur* looked curiously at the other before he made any reply.



“‘IS IT NECESSARY THAT YOU SHOULD GO?’”

heard to say a good thing of anyone, he had never been known to do anyone any harm. He himself, when taxed with his omissions or the futility of a method of life which, while it annoyed others, certainly pleased himself, would bow and say, *Je suis, Dotricourt—flâneur!* and consider that the discussion was at an end. Vavin saw his fat little figure

“Is it necessary that you should go?” he said.

“Yes, I must go; the opportunity is too good to be missed. I shall entirely hold the field. It is naturally a nuisance. But why do you ask that?”

“Well, I wouldn’t go; that is all,” said Dotricourt.

“You are talking in riddles, and the

Boulevard is no place for sphinxes. Tell me what you mean."

"If I did you would only laugh. I have the greatest reluctance to tell you, owing to the way the information came into my hands. I must beg of you not to press me."

"But, my friend, this is unfair. You solemnly warn me against my proposed journey and then leave me in doubt and suspense as to what you mean. I really must insist on knowing."

"Soit," said Dotricourt, "I will tell you"; and with a quick glance round he leant forward and whispered in the other's ear. Vavin started, and quickly made the sign of the cross. Then he emptied his glass and began to laugh. "Poof!" said he, throwing out his right hand. "Look at the sun; listen to the people of Paris. Can you and I believe these things in the Paris of to-day? Bah! leave such imaginations to the priests who invented the devil, and Huysman who invented his worship. We are not on the level of those little journals written for *cocottes* who love to fill their empty little heads with horror. We are men. Louis, two coffees, and bring me the brandy in the bottle."

He leant back laughing loudly, an unpleasant sight, with his long pale face and wicked mouth. Dotricourt shrugged his shoulders. "As you will, Paul," he said, "for my part, though, I do not think about things which appear incredible; I am wise enough to allow that they may possibly exist. But, as you say, we are men; Paris is here, let us enjoy it, you and I. You do not start till to-morrow, you say?—good. To-night we will be merry with some friends of mine in the Quartier, who after three years of penury have sold a picture well and are giving a feast to all the world. There will be Filles d'Angleterre and Groggs américaines. Shall it be so?"

"Parfaitement," said Vavin, giving the true Boulevard twang to that useful and long-suffering word, and about nine o'clock they went to the feast, which by midnight degenerated into the usual orgie of the Quartier Latin. It was the last time Vavin degraded himself in this world.

About midday next morning, ill and tremulous, he took the train for Dieppe.

It was a perfect day for a journey, serene and sunny, a day in which the blood raced in one's veins from the pure joy of living in a beautiful world. The sky was like a great hollow turquoise, and all along the line the sweet cider orchards of Normandy were a mass of pink and cream colour. Vavin noticed none of these things. He was reading some abominable little gutter rag, and as far as his throbbing nerves and aching head would allow him, he enjoyed its scurrility. He rolled and smoked innumerable cigarettes of black tobacco, inhaling the smoke deep into his craving lungs, and from time to time drank some cognac from a flask. There was something peculiarly revolting in the fellow, and he seemed a blot on the beautiful day God was giving to France.

As they left Rouen, and the giant spire of the cathedral flashed away behind, stark in the warm sky, his head sank on his breast, his lower jaw dropped, and he fell into an uneasy sleep. He was awakened at Dieppe by the stopping of the train and the invigorating sea air upon his face.

He determined that he would wait an hour or two, before he drove to Envermeu, and see what celebrities were on the Plage or in the Casino. Dieppe was alive with gaiety and colour, and the Casino Terrace was crowded with well-dressed people of different nationalities. Down below, the green sea with its pearl and yellow lights leapt under the slanting sun-rays. Everything was gay and delightful, for every effort of Nature and Art combined to make it so. There was a good band playing on the Terrace, and as Vavin sat there idly, feeling the better for his sleep, his sluggish blood began to stir within him and something of the light-heartedness that was in the very air entered into him also. The light was very long and the sweet melancholy of a summer's evening was stealing over land and sea when he got into a carriage and slowly mounted the steep hill past the Octroi station, which was surrounded with market-carts full of the produce of the country side. He cursed his luck as the carriage came out into the long white high road. He would much rather have been in Dieppe and spent a bright evening in the Casino, where there was a

dance, or sitting in the Café des Tribunaux with some congenial friend. The peace of the woods and fields found no echo in his heart, and the delicate sound of the breeze, as it rustled among the quivering leaves of the roadside poplar trees, fell on his ears with no meaning.

He had not always been so. In his early youth he had listened to the voices of wood and hill and torrent and found some responsive echo in his own heart. He had known something of the poetry of life when he was a boy. But Paris, with its life full of evil sensation, and a strenuous greediness after every material pleasure, had killed his delicate emotions, and as he rode towards his death Nature’s last message came to him unheeded. As, in a dull and petulant mood, he sat in the carriage, he was a striking example of the mere “folly” of debauchery. When he arrived at last at the little village of Envermeu he stopped at the cabaret the “Pannier d’or,” and inquired about the road to the Maison Noir. The house, the landlord told him, was on the very outskirts of the wood, and there was no road to it that a carriage could traverse.

It was, however, added the patron, an easy way, and Jean the stable-boy could carry his bag if he intended to stop there for the night. Vavin had been proffered the hospitality of a bed by the artists in the letter they had written to Varnier, and accepting the offer of a porter he stepped into the inn and ordered a cognac. He sat there for a few minutes smoking a cigarette, and he noticed that the inmates of the house seemed to be in some trouble.

The landlord’s face was white and drawn, with the look of one who had not slept, and the eyes of his wife, a buxom Norman girl, were red with weeping. The few peasants who were in the place, drinking a rummer of beer after their work in the fields was done, talked in subdued tones, and now and again ventured a word of sympathy to the host and his wife. An air of gloom and also of expectation seemed to hang over the place, and every chance footstep on the road outside attracted instant attention. At last a firm tread was heard upon the flags, mingled with the

clank of metal against stone, and the village *gendarme* entered,

“Ah, Pierre!” said the woman with a catching of the breath. “You have heard something, have you not? You have found her? Tell me you have!”

“No, Marie,” said the man, “not yet, I do not know anything yet; but courage! They are all out on the country side. They will find her by night; no harm can come to her. The little one is asleep in the wood, that is all, and our Good Lady will watch over her tenderly, you may be sure. She is certain to do it—our Lady. Père Gougi is even now upon his knees in church, and you know he has great influence with the Blessed Dame. So courage, Marie and Michel! I will find your little Cerisette before moonrise. Even now they may have found her—all the boys are beating through the wood. How we shall all laugh to-night, shall we not? It will be a good excuse for a carouse. *Au revoir!*” And twirling his heavy moustache and throwing back his head with a confident gesture, the worthy fellow clanked out into the street. His firm and cheery voice, and the official air which his uniform gave to his utterances, had a reassuring effect upon every one.

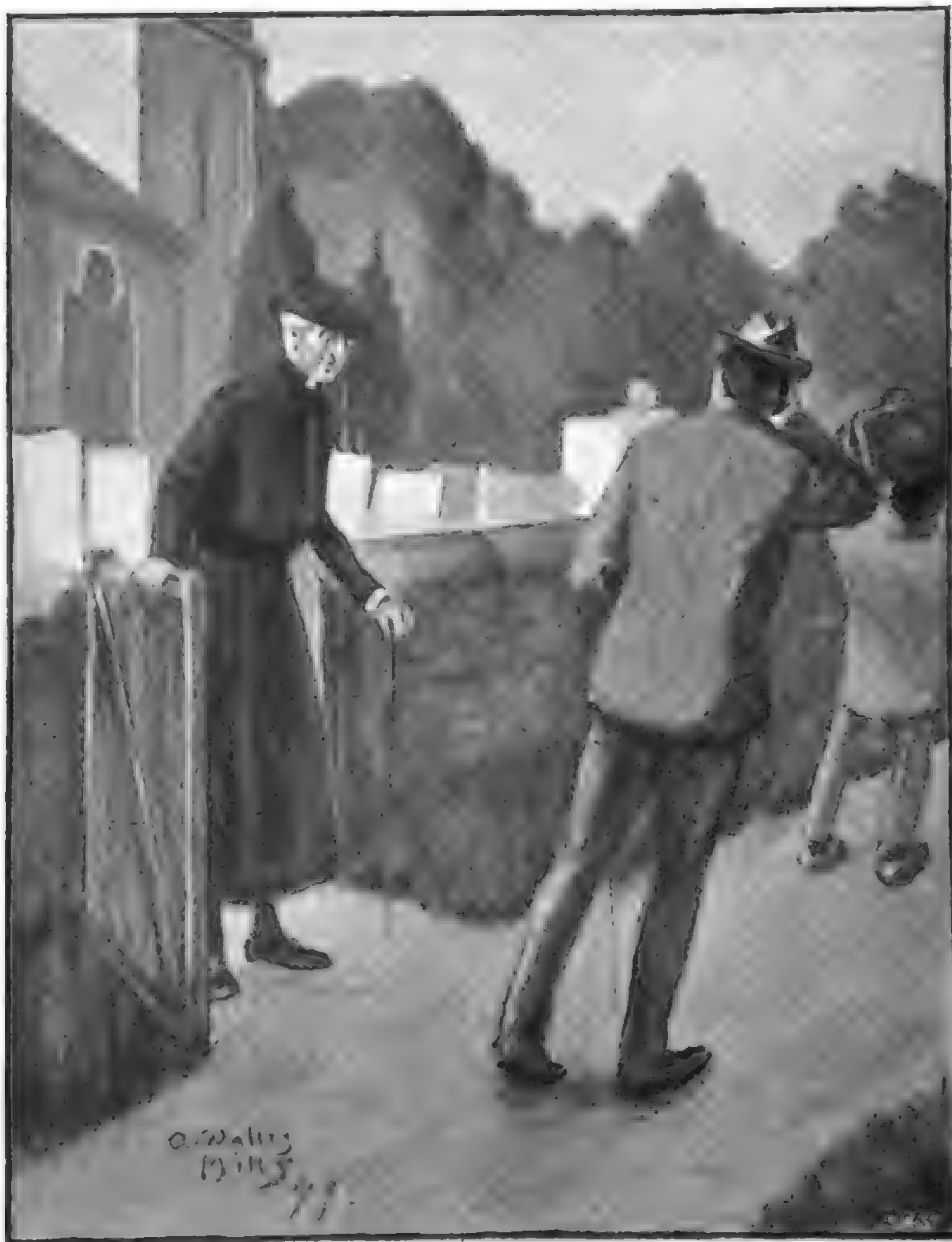
“*Eh bien, ça ira,*” said one rustic to another, “Pierre will find little Cerisette, he has a wonderful mind. What he does not know I would not give a dried apple for. He is *bon garçon* is Pierre.”

The sorrowful mother herself seemed a little comforted, and Michel turned to Vavin and said:

“Ah, yes, m’sieu, we shall find her soon if Father Gougi prays for her; it will be all quite right soon, only, m’sieu, you may conceive that we are a trifle disturbed. Our little girl is only three years old, and it’s a bad thinking to know the poor little mite has lost herself with evening falling.”

Vavin was rather touched, a sensation that surprised him as it came.

“Oh, you will find little Cerisette to-night,” he said kindly, “and look you, to-morrow I will come and make her acquaintance with a handful of bonbons, and then she will not be frightened by my ugly face. And now give me a stable-lad to lead me to the Maison



"BOWED POLITELY TO THE STRANGER"

Noir, for it grows late, and before dark I must be there. Good night and good fortune; the angels will watch over Cerisette."

He went out into the street with something like tenderness in his heart; and the simple love of the peasant and his wife, and their belief that the Mother of God would keep watch and ward over the little wandering child brought a mist before the eyes of the boulevardier. One is glad now to think that he was a little touched. He walked down the village street with the stable-lad trudging by his side, and, as they passed the church, the

curé came out, a kindly and venerable old man, and bowed politely to the stranger. The way went past the village mill, over a little bridge leading to the cornfields which skirted the wood, which was beginning to show black against the rosy western sky.

"Is it far?" Vavin asked the guide.

"But some fifteen minutes from here," said the boy. "Monsieur will not be in the least fatigued. The chalet is on the edge of the wood."

"And what are they like, the artist gentlemen who live there?"

"I have never seen them," said the boy, "but they do not come to mass,

and they do say in the village that there is something strange about them. There is a big one and a little one, and M. Michel says that the big one is like Satan himself. But I do not believe him. M. Michel is stay-at-home and does not know about things. I have been to Rouen and he never has, and I have been up the tower of the cathedral and seen the figure of Jeanne d'Arc in the market-place. I am very experienced, m'sieu. I think it is foolish to believe all that one hears. I never do it, I would rather see for myself."

As he spoke they came upon a small common, dotted with furze and leading to the edge of the wood. In the fading light Vavin could see a tall house, surrounded by walls, some four hundred yards away.

"Is that the place?" he enquired.

"That is it, monsieur."

"Then I will trouble you no longer. Give me the bag. Here is a five-franc piece for you; remember what you have told me. Take nothing on the evidence of other people. Trust nobody but yourself. It is the only way. Good-night."

The lad took the coin with profuse thanks, and, with a genial "*Dormez bien*," went back away through the fields. Vavin could hear him singing as he went. Then, while he drew near the house, the world grew silent as the night crept upon it. In the wood an owl hooted and a fox gave tongue, but the sounds seemed to be outside the stillness and unable to break it. The last dying fires of the day gleamed in the west, and in the front rose the tall, lonely house, sharply outlined in a silhouette.

He was within some sixty paces of the place when the profound stillness was broken by the musical notes of a bell. The bell gave three or four beats—like the Angelus—and simultaneously, from a curious squat chimney on the roof, came a single, sudden puff of purple smoke, which hung for a moment, like a little cloud, over the house, and then slowly dispersed. Everything became silent again. It was just as if some one had thrown a handful of powder—some incense one might have fancied it to be—on a furnace at the bottom of the chimney.

The sudden, extraordinary occurrence arrested Vavin's steps, and he stood still in a great surprise. There was something disturbing in the whole thing. The melancholy hour, the lonely house, and the dark, mysterious forest beyond, all seemed to be in keeping with the sudden tolling and the puff of smoke. It was all unreal and fantastic, and for a moment he felt inclined to turn back and seek the safe companionship of the inn.

"It is like a drawing by Karl Böhm," he muttered; and then, ashamed of his uneasiness, he walked resolutely up to the house, skirting the wall till he came to a door. There was a bell-handle let into the wall, and, pulling it vigorously, he waited. The peal reverberated loudly some distance away. He listened for nearly two minutes, waiting for the sound of footsteps; but there was an absolute silence. No dog barked, no doors shut, there was no sign that any life was near the place. He resolved to give another pull, and at the precise moment when his hand touched the handle and he was about to grasp it, the door opened noiselessly, and a voice said:

"Will Mr. Vavin be pleased to come inside?"

It was very startling. There had been no indication whatever that any one was there; and the fact that the door had opened at the exact moment when his fingers touched the handle of the bell seemed theatrical and unreal. It was like some mechanical trick. He did not like it.

The person who had so startled him was a tall and very stout man, dressed as a servant. There was nothing unusual about him, except the singular smoothness of his large, clean-shaven face, which was unmarked by a single wrinkle.

"My masters expect you," he said, taking Vavin's portmanteau and leading him across the garden which stood round the house.

The place did not look nearly so gloomy on the other side of the high wall. The garden was laid out in parterres of bright flowers, and the white gravel paths were trim and neatly kept. At this hour, just as the dew was falling,

the earth gave out a pleasant, moist smell; and the perfume from this old garden of mint and marigold and mignonette lay in strata of fragrance on the still evening air. The house itself was less attractive—a tall, white erection, with little to break the monotony of line and colour but the green venetian shutters on either side the windows. At the left side of the building was a large chapel-like edifice, jutting out to meet the wall, and, from the position of its windows and skylights, Vavin could see that this was the studio. It was here, also, he noticed that the squat chimney from whence the smoke had come was placed, and he caught a hasty glimpse of a copper bell hanging from a joist which projected from the gable. He had just time to notice these things when they arrived at the door, which was standing open, leading into a lofty hall somewhat sombre in its furniture and dark decorations.

"M. Stein and M. Beaugerac will be with you in a few minutes," said the man. "They are at present engaged in the studio. Monsieur will, no doubt, not object to wait in the study."

The room in which Vavin found himself was furnished with a good deal of luxury and an obvious attention to the little details of comfort. It reassured him at once. Some delightfully-bound books lined the fireplace wall, the mantelshelf bore pipes, cigarette cases, and all the little *personalia* of a bachelor establishment, and the chairs were soft and roomy. There were a good many drawings scattered about the walls—drawings of that esoteric morbidity that Vavin loved; and the walls were further decorated with a good many African curiosities. There were long, cruel-looking knives, horns of roughly-beaten copper and bronze, and a little drum of serpent skins.

He noticed also, displayed upon a shelf, a thing which he recognised at once, though he had never seen one before. It startled him, for he knew that there were, probably, only two more in Europe. He took it up, examining its shining steel and leather, with a little shudder at the horrible instrument of which so much had been

said and written. He could not understand its presence here, for even in the darkest places of the West African coast the instrument was rare. It interested him to see it, and the fascination it exercised was in itself a pleasing sensation. It would be a great tale to tell when he went back to the Boulevard, he reflected—how he had seen and handled that devil-knife. He would be able to describe the real appearance of it, and to confute many morbid minds who were in the habit of dwelling on the thing.

He had just put the frightful object down when he heard voices and footsteps in the hall. He listened curiously, unable to account for the strangeness with which one of the voices fell upon his ear. The two men outside, whom he concluded were his hosts, were giving some directions to the servant, and the voice of one of them, though it spoke in a cultured manner, and in excellent French, had a curious and indefinably unfamiliar ring. The mystery was soon explained, for in a minute or two the door opened and Beaugerac came into the room, followed by Stein. Beaugerac was a youngish-looking man with an impassive face and close-cropped black hair; but his companion attracted Vavin's instant attention. With a start of inexpressible surprise he saw that Stein was no less than a negro, of full black blood. More than six feet high, and enormously broad, he was a splendid specimen of a man, and his almost coal-black face and thick, yellowish lips proclaimed him of a family which had known no alien admixture of race. Stein was very well dressed indeed, and his manners and conversation were those of a well-bred gentleman. He spoke French without a single trace of foreign accent, and he talked with the ease and point of a citizen of the world. To Vavin it was extraordinary to find this great negro—who one might have imagined with a headring, and a spear in his hand—a person of the most assured and cultured cleverness, and a man who would obviously dominate any society in which he might be found.

He greeted Vavin very courteously, and after a well-served dinner they went into the studio to see some of the posters

the artists were engaged on. The studio was very large and lofty. A poster-artist cannot work in a small space, because it is necessary that he should be able to get some distance away from his work to judge the effect that it will have upon the hoardings. It was bare

for they did not quite reach the roof, a dull glow, as from a fire or from shaded lamps, threw monstrous purple shadows among the joists and beams. The place was full of shadows and curious light effects, and in the uncertain illumination it was difficult to see it in its entirety.



“BEAUGERAC ENTERED, FOLLOWED BY STEIN”

of furniture and lighted only by a few oil lamps. The walls were painted a dull maroon, the sad colour presenting nothing to take the eye away from the *affiches* which hung upon it.

One end of the place was entirely cut off from the rest of the room by some heavy black curtains, and above them,

The two artists unrolled poster after poster for Vavin to see and judge upon. Their work was extraordinary in its appropriateness and strength.

Everything was done in flat tones, and the central idea in each production was the importance of the silhouette as a means of expression. Their Duse

poster, for instance, was done entirely in black, brown, and purple, with more than half the lines omitted, and yet the arrangement was so good that the merest hint of an intention was sufficient to produce all the effect of a finished and considered production. There could be no doubt about it; Beaugerac and Stein were head and shoulders above their contemporaries. They were the greatest living exponents of their particular branch of art. Their work, Vavin saw, could not be called decadent. It was too strong in conception and execution for that. There, was, however, he could not help feeling, something sinister about it. These vast pictured creatures, seen so closely, wore a cold-blooded and cruel aspect, and, examined at close quarters, their features, which on the hoardings were so effective, had an air of stupid and sombre malignancy that struck coldly upon his nerves. The impression was heightened by the shadowy studio and the active figure of the great negro as he went hither and thither with the long canvas rolls in his arms. Vavin wanted to be back again in the comfortable sitting-room, there was a chill in this place. Some influence he could not account for was filling his brain and laying cold fingers upon his heart. Beaugerac said very little, and the silence and his occasional sudden jarring laughter was also a disturbing element. Stein was, he thought, too suave and smooth in his manners to be pleasant. The critic felt lonely and ill at ease, and the words Dotricourt had whispered in his ear came vividly to him again and again.

A few days before, Vavin had seen that Mann, Rogers and Greaves, the great English firm of cocoa makers, who had shops in all the big French towns, had advertised that they were about to publish a poster by his hosts. Accordingly, as the memory came to him, he asked them if he might see it. When he made the request, Stein was over on the other side of the studio and Beaugerac was standing near him, but Vavin's words made them wheel round suddenly, and Beaugerac said something in a quick undertone.

"I am really very sorry," said Stein at length, "but most unfortunately the

cocoa poster is packed up in waterproof ready to be sent off to-morrow. What a pity you didn't come a day sooner! Then you could have seen it. These things always happen like that, don't they? I can show you some of the sketches though. Suppose you go back to the study. I will bring them to you. Beaugerac, show M. Vavin back, and I will join him in a few minutes."

Vavin went back to the study, and was left alone. It struck him, as he sat waiting, that there had been something insincere in Stein's remark about the cocoa poster, and he wondered why it had not been shown to him. There seemed to be no very adequate reason he thought. The room was very hot, so he got up and opened the window. As he went back to his seat he noticed, with a start of surprise, that the thing which had been lying there on the bracket had disappeared. The circumstance was strange and he could only conjecture that the instrument had been left there by accident in the first instance. He had hardly settled in his seat, and was feeling in his pocket for some matches, when he heard for the second time the sudden tolling of the bell. It roused his curiosity, already very active, to an almost unendurable pitch. His conversation with the artists had merely enlightened him as to their views on art, and he had been unable, try as he would, to learn anything of their past history. He had asked Stein in what *ateliers* he had studied, and had been met with the suave "Oh, all over the world, my friend. I have never stayed long in one place. I am cosmopolitan." Both his hosts had seemed determined to reveal nothing of their careers. This unusual reticence, together with the attendant circumstances—the sombre studio, the African devil-knife, the unexpected sight of the negro—told him with more and more potency that something was wrong about the place and its owners. The musical notes of the bell, which ceased as suddenly as they begun, put the finishing touches to his uneasiness and curiosity. He rose up again quickly, and going noiselessly through the hall, went out into the warm starlit night, determined to find out what this sudden tocsin foreboded.

He went quietly towards the studio, treading upon the borders of the flower-beds to avoid making any noise upon the gravel. The studio was quite dark, save for one faintly-illuminated window at the end. This window he knew, from its position in the wall, must be behind the black curtain which hid one end of the room. As he approached it he noticed a faint aromatic odour in the air, like the smell of incense.

The window-ledge was some seven feet from the ground, and a small projecting buttress at its foot assisted him to raise his head above the level for a few seconds. As he did so, the light flickered up, and he was able to see with some distinctness what was going on inside. On the wall at the end a great poster was hanging; the design, as well as he could make out, consisted of a large head. In front of the poster stood a table of some dark material, though he could not see what it was. Beaugerac he could not see, but Stein was standing by a brazier full of burning cinders, which was fixed in the wall under a large iron pipe communicating with the chimney. The red light fell on his face and hands, and he appeared to be doing something to the fire. He watched for as long as he could maintain himself in the difficult position, and then with no more information than when he started, quietly returned to the study.

All that he knew was that Stein and his partner had something that they wished to conceal, and that in all probability they had lied to him about the poster.

He had not been long seated when they came in, carrying some drawings.

"We had an awful difficulty in finding the sketches," said Stein; "they had got mislaid. We hadn't any light but the little fire which we use for mixing pigments, and I nearly broke my shin over a table, and nearly hung myself with an old bell-rope, which they used when this place was a school. Very sorry to keep you waiting, but I hurt myself rather badly. All the negro races are very sensitive in the leg bones, and a blow which to you would be nothing is agony to me."

His easy manner and the simple ex-

planation, in some sort, reassured Vavin, and he looked at the sketches with great interest. The design for the poster was simple, consisting of the bust of a negro, which filled nearly all the space, the lower part of the body being out of the picture. The lettering was in bold, crimson characters. The figure was sketched in two browns, with as few lines as possible. Even in the small sketch one could see the enormous power of the thing, and it was easy to imagine the effect the great twenty-foot poster would have in the streets. The face of the figure was so cunning and malignant, such immeasurable wickedness lay in it, that his attention was caught and held as if in a vice.

"You see," Beaugerac said, "our idea, in the first instance, has been to have a single unbroken mass which the eye can readily understand. Then, the idea of a poster being to attract attention, we have made the face as repulsive as possible."

"He is a wicked boy, is he not?" said Stein, leering at the foul thing, and as he did so, himself looking not unlike his own creation. "He would play some fine blood-games if he were alive. What? He would kill his mother, and make a set of dice out of her knuckle-bones, for ten centimes! There is something interesting in his face, yes?—he is cunning, I think?"

Vavin shuddered. Foul as his own imaginings sometimes were, he felt cold to see this great soft-voiced negro nodding and mouthing at his own creation.

"Satan himself has not such a face," he said. And then a strange thing happened, for even as he spoke three or four sudden beats of the bell rang out upon the air. Beaugerac jumped up with an oath, and then suddenly sat down again, and Vavin could see round the corner of the table that the fat hand of the negro was gripping him tightly by the knee.

"O dear, dear me," said Stein quickly, "that stupid cat has got locked up in the studio again. What a nuisance! I'll go and let it out, or it will be upsetting something and hurting itself. I won't be a minute."

Despite his assertion, he was away half-an-hour, while Vavin kept up a fitful conversation with Beaugerac, who was distraught and dull.

When Stein came back he explained that he had found the cat, which had upset a pot of white paint, and that he had had a great deal of trouble in removing the stains from his hands.

About eleven Vavin went to bed, in a highly-strung and nervous condition. His room was at the head of the stairs, and had a window which looked out into the courtyard of the studio. While he was undressing he could not forget the face upon the poster. It filled all his brain and dominated him, and, as he lay awake in the silence, fear came and whispered strange things into his ear.

About two he awoke from a fitful slumber, and, finding himself hot and covered with perspiration, he got out of bed and went to the window, intending to open it wider.

As he came to it he heard a slight movement in the court below, and peering down he could just discover a large grey mass moving across it. The object came right up to the wall and seemed to enter the house at the door just below him. Simultaneously a faint light appeared in the doorway of the studio opposite. The light grew brighter as some one holding it came nearer to the door, until he saw Stein and Beau-



"WITH A HORRID SCREAM HE LEAPT UPON IT"

gerac standing in conversation on the step. The monstrous shadows thrown by the candle did not at first allow him to see their faces, but with a quick pulsing of his heart he noticed at once that in his hand Stein carried the instrument he had seen in the study.

A sudden flicker of the candle which Beaugerac held showed him that they were gazing expectantly at the wall just below him. Beaugerac was smiling.

Fearful that he would be seen, he shrank noiselessly away from the window, and as he did so, he distinctly heard in the passage outside his room the sudden cry of a child awakened from sleep.

He opened the door and crept out.

At the other end of the passage a door stood open and a light shone out towards him. He could hear something moving about in the room, and there was the sound of heavy breathing.

Hearing footsteps approaching the door, he sank into the deep embrasure of a window. The footsteps came slowly along the passage towards him, and then this is what he saw. The black figure of a man, larger than human figure ever was, was walking past him, holding a candle in one vast hand. In his right arm he held a little white-robed girl of two or three years of age, and his face was, line for line, the face of the great poster.

The little child lay quite still, with staring, open eyes, and the thing was bending its head and looking into her face, lolling out its tongue and rolling its great eyes.

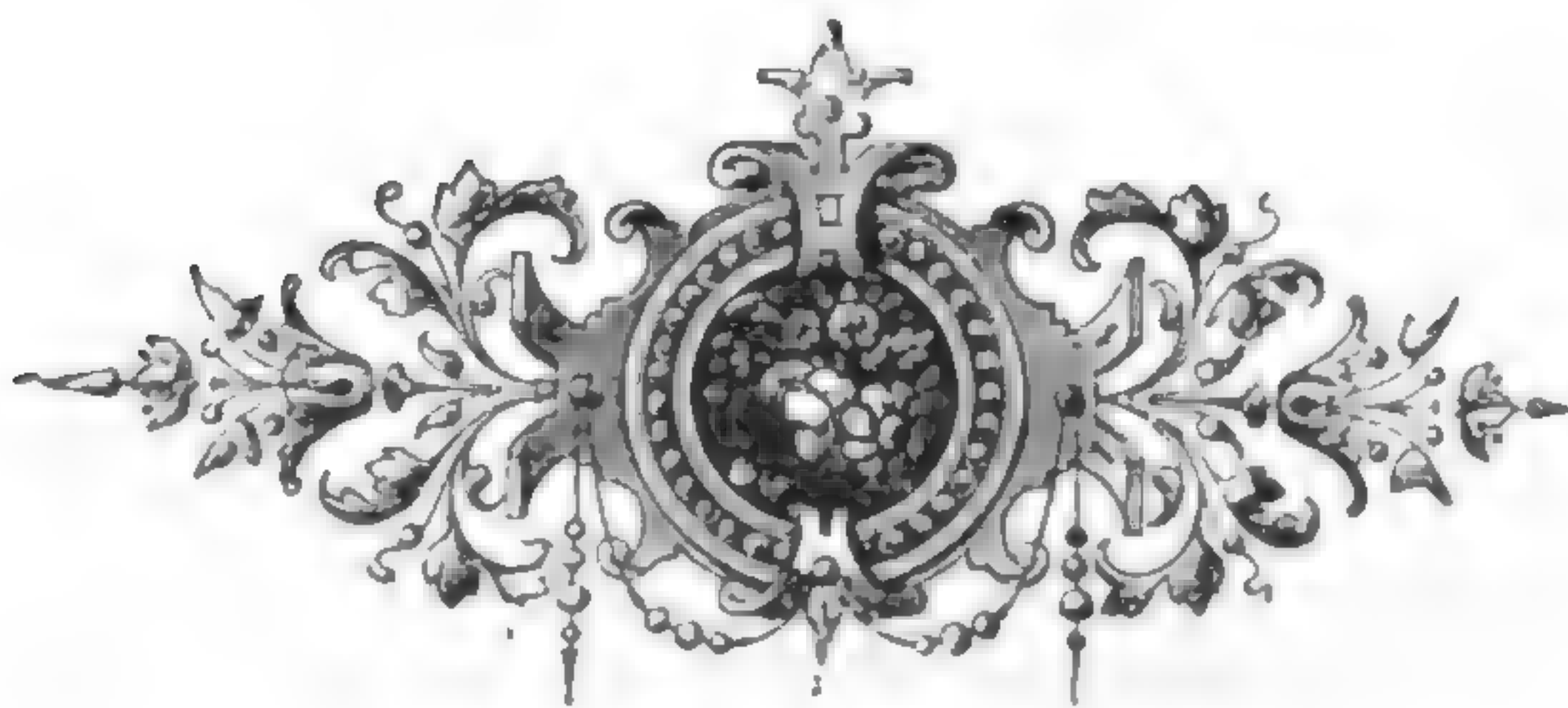
It had just got to the head of the stairs when Vavin was seized with a frightful and uncontrollable wave of passion and hatred for the cruel, bestial thing.

With a horrid scream he leapt upon it, snarling like a dog, and then he was conscious of the shouting of a great company of people, a sensation as of rapidly falling through black water, and nothing more.

He died the next day in agonies or terror, yet not before he had had a long conference with the priest, who gave him absolution.

Before his final paroxysm Père Gougi told him that when the villagers had burst into the house they found little Cerisette white and still at the bottom of the stairway. Stein and Beaugerac had disappeared and were never seen again in Normandy.

It was afterwards discovered that a long package had arrived in the Rue des Martyrs—the Paris office of Messrs. Mann, Rogers and Greaves—with a letter accompanying it from Stein, saying that he sent the completed poster. When it was opened the great sheet of canvas bore nothing but some scarlet lettering.





WRITTEN BY REGINALD BACCHUS AND RANGER GULL.

ILLUSTRATED BY A. WALLIS MILLS



HE crack and grumble of the band had blared into silence, for it was very late, and the circus in the main tent was over.

A few cowboys and bar tenders still lingered talking to the officials of the show: but men were going about with battered brass extinguishers on the end of long thin poles, painted red and white—like barbers' poles—extinguishing the kerosene lamps, which hung from the copper brailing-pins above.

In the menagerie tent, a huge erection of brown Pulamite sack-canvas which opened out of the central building, stood the forge, with its glowing braziers and litter of pincers, the red light playing upon the long aluminium hammers that American circus smiths use. Round about the warmth, although it was very hot, stood several of the staff, drinking rye whisky from a bottle which stood upon the fore-peak of an anvil. The tent resounded with savage vibrations from the lion cages. The fretting of mangy wolves and jackals, restless in the pain of their captivity, mingled

with the trumpet-rumble of the elephants who stood among the straw at the end of the place. Their brown figures rocked to and fro unceasingly.

Close to the group of men, a brown bear, with little pig-like eyes, paced regularly round its small and dirty cage, and the soft sound of its pads could be distinctly heard amid all the tumult of the prisoners, who year by year yelped away their miserable lives.

The travelling circus and show of George Zachary, who in his day had been a "bruiser" of repute, held first place in the Western States of America. Zachary himself, a ponderous, evil-minded old fellow, was still popular with all the rascaldom of the West, from Seattle city to the Golden Gate. His circus and menagerie, with its magnificent animals, its clever riders and beast-tamers, its unrivalled collection of living travesties of the human form, was the great annual pleasure of half a hundred boom cities. His performers were known by name to every one; his own personality, as he drove about in his buggy, with its silver-plated wheels, was herald of greater joys than the advent of a rich candidate for the State Legislature, and many a young rancher in these maidless wilds felt his heart



"A PONDEROUS, EVIL-MINDED OLD FELLOW"

expand with excitement when he thought of the pretty circus girls who followed in the great Zachary's train.

The show had just arrived in Heron, a large agricultural centre, not far from Spanish Peaks. For three days the cumbrous wagons and caravans had poured into the town, and disappeared inside the high enclosure of brarah-wood which had been built for them. Three days before, the watchers had caught the first sight of the elephants coming far away through the plains of roil grass. An army of rough saddle-coloured men had been busy building the central rotunda, and painting it in great streaks of white and crimson, which shrivelled

and blistered in the fierce sun. All the next day the anxious people of the town had seen the huge tents rise up above the fence, had heard the muffled noise of strange beasts, and noted with growing excitement the hum and rattle of the workmen, the busy activity of the encampment, and all the stir and movement of a great company. Then old Zachary, in his precious buggy, drawn by two grey St. Paul stallions, had driven about the town, and shown himself in the liquor saloons, his fat hands blazing with rings. He had told of some new attractions since last year—a pretty girl, who did flying trapeze acts, a Bean-faced Man with no ears, and a yellow creature from Penang of unmentionable deformity.

Intense interest was excited in the town, and on that evening the show had been crowded with people, a hot sweltering mass, who pushed and shouted and sang, till the animals had been excited to frenzy by the heat and clamour, and the whole staff of the show, from Zachary in his office to the stable-lads and negro grooms, were utterly tired out.

Now the long day's work was over, and they were all preparing to rest, and almost every one was seeking sleep but the little group around the forge. The bandmen were putting away their instruments in the box seats on which they sat; the circus horses were being rubbed down in the stables; and inside the menagerie tent the engineer was raking out the fire of the engine attached to the automatic organ, which all day long mingled its mechanical music with the complaints of the animals.

The men who were standing round the forge were the heads of the various departments. There was the keeper of the elephants and camels, the keeper of the caged beasts, the stud groom, the smith, who was also the veterinary surgeon, the transport-master, the band-master, and the head clerk and business man, whose duty it was to make all the advertising arrangements. They were all lean, hard-featured men, with long hair and sombrero hats. All of them carried small nickel-plated revolvers in their belts, and their speech was the speech of the bar and gambling-saloon.

One might have imagined the knot of men to be bandits plotting in the dim red light of the forge, where bars of iron were being kept at a white heat in case of a disturbance among the animals. The whole scene was Rembrandtesque, if one may say that a painter can create an atmosphere, and the shadowy animals all round added to it something incalculably grotesque. The men were waiting for Zachary and his son, who should give them their orders for the next day.

Presently the father and the son came towards the forge from the ring. George Zachary, the elder, was a large, fattish man, with shrewd, black eyes, and features which had been beaten out of shape in many wild fights. His son Maxwell was a florid young man full of blood, and with a sticky, purple complexion. He had dull grey eyes, reddish under the rims, and they were set very deeply in his head. He was a cruel-visaged creature and his voice was like the bellowing of a brazen bull.

The two men came slowly up the tent talking together. When they reached the group of subordinates and began to give them their orders, there could be no doubt that they had a thorough grip of their work, and were men cut out to organise and command. The old man made his points quietly and quickly, emphasising them with many admonitory wags of his forefinger. There were directions as to forage, the supply of meat for the carnivora, the hours of performances, the advisability of a procession of clowns and camels through the town, all the technical details of a vast and cumbrous organisation. The old man, a veritable Napoleon of the ring, seemed on excellent terms with his men, as he stood helping out his memory by a scrap of paper in his hand.

Whenever he made a joke or flung a ribald witticism among them, his son Maxwell gave a sudden bark of laughter, and rattled the money in his pockets.

This young man, one saw, had no emotions but the elemental desires and fears of the simple animal. Some characteristics from many of the animals about him seemed to have passed into him. There was something relentless

and cruel in his aspect. It is exceedingly difficult to judge such a man. To say that his training and environment inevitably predestined him to cruelty, would be to deny that man is above his servants, the beasts, and can ever conquer his lower self. Yet, on the other hand, many of this man's brutalities were committed through ignorance and an utter lack of that half-memory which we call imagination. The soft clay of his brain was moulded by the lusts and impulses of the moment into the shape his passions desired. It is certain that, whatever the mainspring of his actions, Maxwell was a vulgar-minded rascal with an astonishing and almost physical delight in sheer devilish cruelty. No Spanish village boy burning live sparrows in an earthen pot was so callous a wretch as he, and this man, with the red of the sun-strength on his cheeks, had a morose delight in the pain of others, the shameful lust of a Nero, without the excuse of Nero's madness.

The old man, his father, was a hard and sensual rogue, without a care for any one but himself, and as greedy and unsavoury a rascal as ever shamed white hairs, but he was not an unnecessarily cruel man. The rough showmen were intelligences without pity, and hardened to suffering, but they did not take the pain of others as a sweet morsel in the mouth, a gleeful spectacle to gloat upon. In all that crowd of cosmopolitan black-guardism no one was so bad as the younger Zachary. It was visible in his eyes and hands, for this roughly-moulded, ungraceful man had fingers of great length, white fingers with corded knots, which gave them a certain resemblance to the claws of a preying beast.

He stood by his father for some minutes, waiting till all the directions had been given to the men, and then, turning, the two went out across the yard into a wooden bungalow, which had been run up for their accommodation, and in a room of which supper awaited them.

"The takings were forty dollars more than last time we opened," said Zachary, as they sat to the meal. "We shall have a fat month. All the sheep boys are in this town with their wages, and every holy boy of the lot 'll come

round each night. I've fixed up the 'Sentinel' with a box and lush free for the staff and their women, when they come in, and the boss is doing an article on the freaks. I saw a proof to-day in Olancho's saloon—all about the 'Whatisit', and the Malay, and the Bean-faced Man. It'll wake the married women up, they like those blamed freaks, frightens them, and is as good as a dram. Oh, now I think of it, send a nigger to wash that 'Whatisit'; it's impossible to keep the little hog clean. I don't care what it's like in its cage at night, but I am not going to have it showing on the platform like it's been lately—enough to make you sick; nasty little brute."

"I will," said Maxwell, "first thing to-morrow; and that reminds me about that blasted dwarf; he said when we were leaving Denver, that the first chance he'd got he'd claim his freedom and be off. It doesn't matter here, because they'd laugh at him, but there's lots of places where there would be a big row if people knew."

Zachary swore violently, and banged the table with his fist, the diamonds on his fingers sending out rapid scintillations of light which seemed as if they had been struck out of the wood by the impact of the blow. "Frighten the swine out of his life," he shouted; "half-kill him if you like. I bought that dwarf from Dr. Cunliffe for two hundred dollars—he used to use him to wash out his bottles—and he's the best dwarf in the States. I wouldn't lose him for double the money; he's one of our big draws. I could get twenty dwarfs as small as he is, but his head is double the size of an ordinary man's, and the little cuss makes the women laugh till they cry from it. Punish him till he daren't open his mouth."

"I'll settle him, I'll put him to sleep in the 'Whatisit's' cage, that'll keep his mouth shut. I thrashed him with a tent peg all along the curve of his spine the other day, and I'll do it again. That's the worst of him, he got some education and that from the doctor, and he isn't loony like the rest of them. The 'Whatisit' can't do anything but slobber; and the Bean-faced Man is an idiot who doesn't care about anything as

long as you give him plenty of meat and don't kick him. Then the others haven't got the spunk to say a word, seems to take it out of them being freaks like. It's only the dwarf that bothers. I believe he gets talking to the others as well. I won't let them be together after the show any more."

"That is the best way, we don't want any damned trade-unionism among our freaks. I should frighten that dwarf as soon as possible or we shall have some swab-mouthed parson coming in and asking him if he's happy and that."

"I'll see to it to-night later; I'm going to see Lotty for an hour first. She's staying at the hotel opposite."

The elder man frowned and drummed his fingers impatiently upon a plate. "I tell you it's no good," he said, "no good at all. You don't want a wife messing round and spoiling your fun. You wouldn't be worth half what you are now to me if you were married. However I'm not the man to say, 'Do this,' or 'Don't do this,' to you. You must slide on your own rail; I only give you advice, and it's your own fault if you don't take it—you must make your own little hell for yourself, I don't care. But I tell you this for certain, Lotty won't marry you if you keep on till the Resurrection day. That girl isn't going to be tied down to a travelling showman. She costs me a hundred dollars a week, and she'll get that anywhere. She's a holy star, and she knows it. She's not going to stop in the West, she'll be in New York in the winter, the boss turn in the city. You've asked her once already. It's all very well, my lad, but I've got no illusions about myself or about you neither. We can't cut no ice, we're good enough to run a big show and make our chips, but we aren't much prettier to look at than a buck nigger, and a big full-blooded girl like that, training every day of her life, 'll marry a straight man of steel and velvet who 'll love her like she wants to be loved. Teeth of a Jew! D'ye think I've spent fifty years on the road all over the world not to know a man or woman when I see them. There's classes and classes, my boy. There's the 'Whatisit' with the blood of a frog and the brains of a maggot, and there's

a big straight English cow-boy with a little moustache and hair bleached yellow by the sun. What chance have you? Not a damn chance and that's true. Now look here, Max, you don't want a wife. You can buy plenty of love if you care about such, you stay quiet and run along with me and keep the buggy straight."

At the end of his oration, which he had delivered with all the glibness of the showman, making his points by a sudden snapping of the word to be emphasised, Zachary leant back and regarded his son with a satisfied smile. The young man listened carefully, nothing perturbed, and seemed to be weighing his father's words. He knew that his father had seen men and things, and knew affairs, and the mere accidents of everyday life had taught him an ungrudging respect for the old man's *savoir vivre*. When some dishonest trick was to be played, who was more fertile in resource than his father? When men were to be bullied or cajoled, who could storm or wheedle so well as he? At his side he had learnt all his own cunning, for he had had no other guide.

"It's like this, boss," he said, "just this. I mean to have that girl if I can get her. She wouldn't hear of anything but marriage. You may or may not be right about marriage being a bad egg; that I put away. I think you're right about a girl like that liking a handsome fellow better than me. Well, I'll ask her once more, to-night, and if she won't have me, well, she may go and rot. I'll not trouble her more. But some one 'll have to suffer and I lay to that."

"Right-on, Max," said the old man, "see Lotty again if you like, and do your best. She won't have you, but still try again. I wish you luck; let's have a bottle on it."

He picked up a long tandem horn which rested on a shelf by his chair, and blew a sounding blast that echoed on the night air and made all the dogs in the yard give tongue. It was his humour to summon his servants in this way, he liked the pomp and circumstance of it. A black boy came running at the sound.

"Bring a bottle of wine," he cried,

and when the champagne came, the two men drank merrily together in the little room. "Boys 's better than girls," said the old man to himself, as Maxwell went out into the night.

Waking the sleepy negro watchman, Maxwell passed out of the heavy gates into the main street of the town. The night was brilliant as a diamond, and still as a place under the sea. The air was fresh, and full of a sweet pungency from the plains of grass and wheat. The hotel where he was going was some hundred yards away down the street, and as he approached, the musical twanging of a banjo came through the lighted windows, the genial "rumptum-tum" promising merriment within. From where he stood at the top of the long street he could see the prairie rolling far away in blue-green waves under the moon. Behind, on the lower slopes of the hill, clustered the wood and stone houses of the town. There were few sounds save the banjo, or the occasional grunting of a sleepless elephant in the enclosure behind. As in all Western cities, on either side of the road were long rows of trees. To nearly every tree a horse was tethered. The saloons and hotels are open all night in Western America, and the cow-boys and fruit farmers ride into the towns after their day's work is done, and stable their horses in this primitive fashion. Sometimes they sleep beside them. Maxwell walked slowly towards the inn, revolving dimly what he should say to the girl. His sorry brain resented the necessity for the appeal which it was trying to formulate. The very nature of the man revolted against any lordship but his own will. To ask, to be suppliant, was an unpleasant thing; in fact this vulgar rascal had even a touch of pride, an emotion which perhaps dignified his sordidness. It would, he thought, be so infinitely more satisfactory to catch hold of Lotty and tell her that she had got to marry him, and then make her sit on his knee and minister to his entertainment. So he came uneasily up to the verandah of the inn.

Lotty was sitting at the head of a table, with her arm round another girl. In a lounge chair, sat a beautiful young

man with a banjo. He was a boy of some two-and-twenty years, with a brown clear-cut face and blue eyes, and Lotty and her friend were laughing at some anecdote he was telling them. Maxwell went into the room just as the young man rose to go. He noticed that the stranger, as he stood by Lotty making a farewell, was a handsome fellow, not unlike the type that old Zachary's words had conjured up. Certainly the man and woman made a pair to be admired by any one who could appreciate a fine animal. Lotty was straight as a stalk of wheat, and as supple as an osier. Her gymnastic training kept her eyes clear, her skin cool, and her hair glossy. She wore a long, clinging tea-gown, which showed the noble curves of her figure, and in which, for all its lace and drapery, she looked more like a boy than a girl. A hardy, bold, and self-reliant creature you saw her to be, with a bitter tongue. A shrewish, but a clean-minded woman. When the youth had gone, and they could hear his spurs clanking down the street and the noise of his awakened horse, Lotty turned to the other girl, a circus-rider who lived with her, and sent her to bed, saying that she would follow immediately. Then she turned to Maxwell and stood looking at him for a moment.

"I've been wanting a bit of talk with you," she said; "there's several things you've got to have out with me, you bloody-minded cur." Her strong hand opened and shut with gathering excitement, her head was bent forward and shook a little on its poise, her voice was quiet, but it had dropped a full octave in tone, and sounded like the distant tolling of a bell. Maxwell saw at once that he was to have no chance that night, but he resolved to see the thing out. He said nothing at all, but sat down in the chair just vacated by the young man with the banjo. He was in a state of considerable nervous tension at the sudden onslaught, but his mind was perfectly clear. He scowled nervously at her.

"I'm going to talk to you," said the girl quietly. "I'm going to tell you what I thought of you, and what I think of you now. I'll show you, you low

devil, what a decent girl thinks of you. You've asked me to marry you twice, and you've come here to ask me again to-night. I would rather marry the lowest nigger in the show than you. Oh, fool and coward, you that dare lift your eyes to me, who am but a circus girl. Oh, coward! May God stab your black heart and let you die; you're too bad a man for me. I know all your wickedness and I'll see you in gaol yet for it. I know more than you may think I know, more than any one knows, saving the wretched creatures you have tortured. I've been among the freaks, and heard with my own ears what you do at night when you want amusement. Do ye never hear that tatooed Indian girl crying? I'll pray that the sound may run in your ears all your life long. You, a strong man with all the brain of a man, went to that little dumb thing, the 'Whatisit'—and kicked it to make it say something. You did, and said things to the dwarf that I hardly like to think of. Oh, and there's much more that I won't trouble to tell you about. When the fur dropped off the Thibetan cat and it couldn't be shown any more, how did you kill it. You know what you did, and curse you for a cruel hound. Sit down, don't come near me; I'm as strong as you, and I'll kill you if you touch me. Now listen here; you know what I think of you, and what every girl in the show thinks of you. You can't boss me like you do the men, who are afraid to say a word, and this is what I'm going to do. As long as I'm connected with this show of yours, if I hear that you have so much as laid a finger on any of those poor creatures in the Museum, I'll go straight to the Sheriff and have you quodded before you can chew a fig. And more than that, I'll set a boy on to you, a *man* mind you, not a fat lump of wickedness like you, who'll break every separate bone you've got. Now you have heard me, and I'll waste no more time on you. If you have never heard before what a girl thinks of such a man as you, you have heard to-night. But remember, what I say I'll do, I *will* do with no fail; and if you ever dare speak another word to me beyond business matters, I'll strike you in the face."

She hissed the last words at him, trembling with hatred, and then with a swirl of skirts left the room.

The man sat motionless, hardly realising the full meaning of the words he had heard. Bit by bit they percolated his consciousness, and he under-

minutes, and to answer inquiries about his show. The scene was eminently picturesque, and Zachary paused for a few minutes to join a circle of men who were playing draw poker. A master of the game himself, he took the real pleasure of the expert in



"I'LL KILL YOU IF YOU TOUCH ME!"

stood. He showed no trace of passion in his face, though his eye seemed a little inflamed, but walked slowly into the bar saloon, and called for whisky. The room was full of men playing poker and euchre, and he had perforce to stop among them for some few

watching the set faces of the players; and when, after "rise" had followed "rise," till a great pile of dollars and greenbacks lay in the centre of the table, the cards were thrown face upwards on the cloth, and he found then he had placed the winning hand

almost to a card, he turned with a satisfied air to the long, roughly-constructed wooden counter. Some men were throwing dice for drinks, and they recognised Zachary with a respectful salute. Two Chinamen in a corner were haggling over the sale of long, tapering-bladed knives with a young rancher from Wilson settlement; and a tall, vigorous cowboy, with a touch of Indian blood in the masterful curve of his nose, that contrasted strangely with his fair, drooping moustache, was testing the quality of the steel by whittling heavily at the birchwood stick that he carried.

Olancho's saloon was the favourite resort of Heron city, and the white-coated bar tenders were hard pressed to keep up with the demand for cock-tails which they mixed and slung, with unerring accuracy, to the shouting crowd of customers. For a few minutes the excitement of the environment drove other thoughts from Maxwell's brain, but when he was in the long, empty street again, the girl's scornful words came back and stung him into frenzy. Never in his life had such biting words been said to him before, and they lashed him like a steel whip. He was not a man to be much influenced by invective — his life had injured him to that—but this invective was different. It was the contempt, the burning contempt, that hurt so much; and even in his rage he longed for the girl who had so angered him, for as she had spoken all her heart she had looked doubly desirable. He kept forcing himself to remember how beautiful she had looked, and in the remembrance he began to forget the force and point of her utterance. Then once more he felt the lash of her scorn, and it was the more unbearable because in his heart of hearts he knew how right she was, and he knew how dark and foul his cruelty had been. Her indictment was heavy enough, but he knew that she did not know everything — his foulest cruelties were hidden even from her. The Indian girl had not told Lotty all she could have told; and one wretched creature, who could not speak, had a heavier record against his torturer than any one could know.

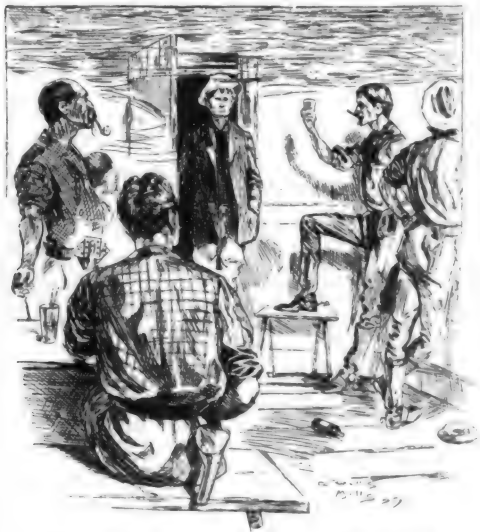
What did it matter, he thought, about the freaks? They were not like other people. He revolved the whole circumstances in his mind, walking savagely up and down in front of the circus gates, an ugly, vulgar sight in the moonlight. Going through the circumstances as dispassionately as he was able, he came to the conclusion that his doings had been told to the girl by some one who had volunteered much of the information, and he was sure in himself that the informant must have been the dwarf of the show. Maxwell hated this little creature with the huge head and bitter leer. It had before now said some unpleasant things to him, things which made him wince; it had stirred up many of the other freaks to resent their captivity and ill-treatment. Maxwell, joying in the sense of power, had kept these poor creatures in a strict imprisonment. He had constituted himself their gaoler and their king, making their wants and happiness dependent on his will. They had all been powerless in his cruel hands. The only protests had come from the dwarf, whose malformation had not sapped his energy and brain. As Maxwell raged in the street, he felt a mad desire to be revenged on the girl.

She should suffer bitterly, he was determined. Yet, as he thought, he could not devise any way in which to harm her. To spread lying reports about her character occurred to him at first, but he knew, on considering the plan, that nothing he could say would hurt her. Physical punishment was impossible; it seemed that he was entirely impotent. It came to him after a time that the girl's informant was at least in his power, and with the thought came the remembrance of his father's words at supper. Here, at any rate, he could work his vengeance. The piteous little atom of humanity who had betrayed him should suffer, and not only he but all the Children of Pain who were his creatures. His mouth tightened, and his eyes contracted with the lust of cruelty, as he knocked at the gate of the enclosure. He passed through the yard, and, opening a side door with a key, entered the central

rotunda, and walked across the tan of the ring.

The only light in the big building came from the moonbeams which struggled in from the windows near the roof. The place was quite silent and ghostly, and the silence was intensified by the fact that his footsteps made

which were grouped the caravans in which the freaks lived. At twelve at night each of them, by Maxwell's order, was shut in its dwelling till morning. Each freak had a caravan to itself, except the "Whatisit," who lay in a straw-covered cage, like a dog. During exhibition hours the wretched



"OLANCHIO'S SALOON WAS THE FAVOURITE RESORT OF HERON CITY."

no sound on the soft floor. He walked swiftly, making for the museum, which opened out of the menagerie. There would be no one about at this hour, and he was determined to vent his temper to the full upon the dwarf and his companions.

The museum was a large tent, round

travesties of mankind showed themselves on platforms in front of their respective dwellings, and the middle of the tent was simply a large open space where the spectators stood. Over each caravan was a gaudily-daubed representation of its inmate.

Maxwell came into the menagerie,

where, in the centre, the forge still glowed dully. The stagnant air of the place was full of the smell of the beasts. In the dark he could hear the fierce grinding of teeth upon a bone, and as he crossed to the entrance of the museum, the hummock of an elephant's shoulder showed, a dim, black mass. As he pulled aside the curtain of the museum, he came close to the cage of a great monkey, and he heard it laughing to itself over some memory.

He came into the tent, round which stood the silent caravans. The dwarf's house was at the end, and as he approached it he saw, with an evil satisfaction, that a light came from under the door, showing that his victim was still awake. He was walking swiftly forwards, when, within but a few yards of the steps of the caravan, something caught quickly at his ankles, and he fell heavily face downwards. He was motionless from the shock for a few seconds; and then, as he was pressing on his bruised wrists to raise his body-weight, he was struck down again flat by the sudden impact of some heavy weight in the small of his back. With his mouth full of sawdust and earth, and his lips cut through and bleeding, he swore savagely in fear. His immediate thought as he felt something spring upon him, was that one of the animals had escaped, and was attacking him, but the next thing that happened undeceived him. Two hands gripped his ankles, and rapidly bound them round with wire; a hard boss of wood was slipped into his mouth, and a handkerchief tied on it; and then he was turned upon his back, and saw shadowy figures about him. Somebody struck a match, and he saw a candle being lit in the bend of a fearful shadow, all velvet black. The light was raised, and he saw it was held by the Bean-faced Man. As the shadows played on the awful face, whose features were but tiny excrescences, and which was moulded into a great curve like a bean, he heard a deep and sudden laugh, like the sound of a stone dropped into a well. A white face that opened and shut its mouth like a fish floated round him, and hands were busy binding his wrists in a web of

cutting wire. He was dragged some little distance by some one behind him whom he could not see, and then was lifted on to a chair, and bound in a sitting posture upon it. When he was fixed tight and still, a little figure ran round in front of him, and in the orange flicker of the candle he saw it was the dwarf, but half clothed in sleeping garments, through which the malformations of his body showed in all their terrible appeal. There was a grey glaze on his large, intelligent face. The air made by the figures which moved round Maxwell sent hot waves that beat upon his cheeks; and there was a scent of ammonia and blood—the true menagerie smell that the showman knows and loves. The dwarf gave a tiny shrill cry, and the doors of the caravans opened, and grey ghostly figures appeared creeping down the steps. It was exactly as if Maxwell were a fly in the centre of a huge web, and from all sides the spiders were creeping towards him. Soon he was surrounded by monstrous faces, all quivering and unstable in the light of the candle. He caught sight of them coming and going—the white man who opened and shut his mouth continually, the great cranium of the dwarf, the lantern-eyed man, a new importation from a surgical school, whose eyes were as large as eggs; they were all around him. The dwarf was the leading figure, and under his guidance the creatures were arranged round the chair in a semi-circle.

A great stillness fell upon them. The only creature who moved was the "Whatisit," who was dancing up and down in a passion of pleasure at the sight of Maxwell so powerless. The little thing lolled out its tongue, and spluttered with triumph at its protector.

It behaved in exactly the same way in which one sometimes sees a tiny child behave when it is pleased, skipping about in a very ecstasy of joy. Then the dwarf stepped into the middle of the circle and spoke.

"My friends," he said, "our hour has come at last. This man has made our lives hell for months. Unhappy as each one of us must for ever be, we have tasted the bitterness of death at



"SURROUNDED BY MONSTROUS FACES, ALL QUIVERING IN THE UNSTABLE LIGHT"

his hands. Because his body is straight and strong, he has had the power to torture us whom God has made in joke. Now it is our turn, and he has fallen into our trap. Is there any one among us who does not feel that he must suffer the penalty we have agreed upon?"

There was no sound in the group except the hysterical sobbing of the fat lady, who was a weak and tender-hearted creature, but even from her large heart came no protest, for she knew that the punishment must be. She was only sorry and frightened.

"No one disagrees," said the dwarf. "Listen, Maxwell Zachary, you devil of hell! You have been judged and found guilty, and this shall be your

punishment: You shall be made even as we are. You shall be carved, and burnt into a freak; and if you die from it, 'twill be no great thing, and there will be one less bloody-minded villain on earth."

The muffled figure on the chair was quite still. They took it up at the dwarf's order, and carried it into the menagerie, placing it close to the glowing forge. They were a grotesque procession. In front, like some frenzied sacrificial priest, the "Whatisit" danced backwards, and panting behind came the fat woman, her vast bulk heaving with pity. "The Lord He knows! the Lord He knows!" she said continually.

The entrance of so large a concourse of people disturbed the animals. A lion growled angrily, and the monkeys chattered in surprise. Maxwell could not move, though but a canvas wall kept him from safety and freedom. He thought all the time of Lotty.

The dwarf pushed some iron bars into the fire, and opened a case of knives.

He was a grotesque caricature of

the surgeon with whom he had lived. He stood by the anvil, which was shoulder-high to him, and looked at the still figure in the chair.

When the work began, a great silence fell upon the place, the captive animals made no single sound, the Children of Pain were absolutely still, the quick, professional movements of the dwarf alone broke the stillness—a monster making a monster.



A CIRCLET of DEATH

WRITTEN BY JANET A. McCULLOCH. ILLUSTRATED BY J. E. GILLINGWATER

IT was the first night of a gorgeous spectacular drama; the theatre would be crammed, as the two ladies—Mrs. Bertram and Mrs. O'Hara, waiting for the husband of the former and the announcement of the carriage, and chatting brightly—knew.

"Oh, Elinor, I have broken one of my bracelets, and I haven't another here. Can you lend me one?" The younger lady, Mrs. O'Hara, was the speaker, and she held out a fair white arm.

"What a pity. I'll go and ransack my case, and see," answered Mrs. Bertram.

"Never mind—this will do beautifully, it is so quaint," said the other (she was only a girl, and a very pretty one), lifting something from a small tray of curiosities near her.

It was indeed quaint: a tiny serpent in the form of a ring, its head and tail loosely twisted to make the circle. It seemed to be of stone, darkly mottled, smooth, but unpolished; its eyes appeared to be small emeralds, not over bright. Quaint it might be; but it certainly looked rather a sombre ornament.

"Why, where did you get such a queer thing?" asked Mrs. O'Hara, slipping it over her hand.

"I found it beside Hugh's trunk to-day. I suppose he must have bought

it when we were in Egypt," said Mrs. Bertram. "It fills me with disgust. I loathe serpents, so I think he kept it himself. It is an ugly creature."

Mrs. O'Hara laughed.

"Now, paradoxical as it sounds, its ugliness is its beauty," she declared. "But what a jump from the grand to the commonplace; from the banks of the Nile to the barracks of Maryhill. That's an asp, of course; isn't it? An imitation of those deadly little wretches that lurked among the lilies, their bite certain and swift death. It calls up all sorts of memories of Egypt, of the Pharaohs and Cleopatra. But here is the Colonel; we must hurry."

They hurried down. They were rather late, and they were to have Colonel Bertram's escort only, as Captain O'Hara would follow later.

"Kathleen broke her bracelet, Hugh, so she has one of your queer Egyptian relics instead," were Mrs. Bertram's first words, as they settled down for the somewhat long drive.

"Which one could you convert to such a use, my dear?" asked the fatherly old Colonel, who was very fond of the bright girl-wife of his junior.

In reply, Kathleen O'Hara held up her wrist.

"Where did you get *that*, Elinor?" demanded the Colonel, sharply.

"On the floor in your dressing-room. I suppose it dropped out when you were

looking for something else. It was beside the box Flynn never touches. I put it in the drawing-room, but forgot to tell you."

Mrs. Bertram was a serene, self-possessed woman, and explained the matter calmly; but had she been able to see her husband's face in the dark corner, she would have been startled. For upon that weather-beaten countenance was an expression she had never in all their married life of thirty years seen there before—*fear*.

The theatre was overflowing—not a seat empty. As she swept the house with her lorgnette, many known faces were discovered by Mrs. Bertram. She did not notice the momentary absence of the Colonel, nor see the note-book-leaf and coin slipped into the hand of an attendant—did not catch the few hurried words whispered.

"Take that to the white-haired man at the end of the second row of stall seats. It is urgent, life or death depends on your quickness," the Colonel had said; but on his entering the box, there was no sign of emotion or flurry whatever, as he seated himself between the ladies.

"Oh, there is Kelly in the stalls," said Kathleen.

"See, Elinor, there's one of the programme boys beside him. He's getting up to leave. Can anything be wrong?"

"Perhaps it may be something at the quarters. You had better go and see, Hugh," said Mrs. Bertram, and her husband instantly went out. But he did not go down; he waited in the corridor.

Kathleen was entranced by the scene on the stage; for a time she was absorbed. But by-and-bye she became conscious of something else; she glanced at her left wrist in pleased surprise. How lovely the Egyptian bracelet was! She had not noticed it closely before. The mottled pattern was vivid red and green, the emerald eyes had a spark of yellow flame in them. As she raised her arm to admire the gems, the girl started, caught her breath with a gasp, her fair face blanched with horror. What awful mystery was this? Was she mad or dreaming? The bracelet had slipped up her arm beyond the

glove, and now lay on the round white flesh, a soft, vivid band of gleaming colour. As she slowly lifted her trembling arm, the yellow-green eyes seemed to sparkle with cruel malignity, the tiny body to writhe and press itself closer around her arm. And oh, horror of horrors! from the lips two slender needle-like fangs darted out and in, quivering and scintillating threateningly, as though they would deal instant death at the slightest touch upon the reptile's body. It was awful, monstrous, to realise that the creature that had been for ages a hard, stone-like, lifeless mummy, had, by the contact of her warm living flesh, revived in all its deadly strength and power. But even as she realised the incredible truth, the brave girl—and Irish girls are braver than most—realised also all that depended upon her actions. Did she move hastily, death swift and sure must be her portion. Did she shriek, as her terror bade her do, a panic would ensue in the crowded house, with what fearful results she was well aware. On the one side was death for her *alone* and helpless; on the other, the death of hundreds, perhaps, not one of whom could have aided her in the smallest. A great dry sob rose in her throat at the thought of her own youth and terrible fate; then she bent her head, and prayed passionately, wildly, that her husband might come in time; that his face might be the last she should see, his voice the last she should hear, ere she passed into the Unknown, from whence this hideous creature had crept forth to destroy her. And, serenely calm, Mrs. Bertram sat near, gazing at the mimic tragedy on the stage, utterly unconscious of the sadder, more horrible tragedy being silently enacted beside her.

To the Colonel, waiting in the corridor outside, the white-haired, cheery-faced man came quickly. He began speaking the moment he came near.

"Well, Colonel, what's up? Anything amiss?" was his salutation; and in answer the other spoke a few sentences in his ear. The florid face of the regimental doctor blanched to death-like pallor.

"Holy Virgin! not that, surely?" he said hoarsely.

The Colonel nodded, but indeed his face revealed enough.

"It is Heaven's truth, Jim. That rascally Arab did not lie. But how horrible to think that a deadly creature could be hypnotised, and its life suspended for thousands of years, not to wake till the warm, living arm of an innocent girl should raise it into vitality and action. These hellish worshippers and priests of Ram and Osiris possessed some fearful secrets of life and death,

old friend, is there no poison or acid, or something, that can kill it off without harming her? For remember, the least irritation, the smallest motion or touch means"—he moistened his dry lips—"death, certain and agonising."

Dr. Kelly shook his head; he could not speak a word of comfort in answer to the frantic appeal. These two were friends and comrades of long standing: the one had been doctor of the crack Irish regiment as long as the other had



"WELL, COLONEL, WHAT'S UP?"

though few in this enlightened nineteenth century can believe it." The Colonel spoke with repressed excitement.

"How could you let her put it on?" demanded Kelly, with a groan of horror.

"I never thought the thing *could* happen. Not till we came into the theatre did I see it properly. Then I saw—too late to remove it. Jim, Jim,

been its colonel. Now they stood helpless, as they had never done in any emergency all the years they had served together.

"Will it not uncoil, and drop of its own accord? Can we not wait? After awhile it may glide away," suggested the doctor. His friend turned fiercely:

"And let the poor girl die of horror and despair! Oh, Jim, you *must* do

something. O'Hara will be here in a little while, and you know him." Colonel Bertram actually shook the sturdy Doctor in his mad demand for help for Kathleen.

"Let me think, Hugh. I'll maybe find a way." The doctor passed his hand across his eyes as Colonel Bertram, with a gasp of dismay, said in anguished tones:

"Quick, Jim, with your plan; there's O'Hara coming. For God's sake, man, settle something before he's told!"

But the doctor was mute—his mental faculties paralysed, as those of his friend had been. These two brave men, who had faced death many times in action, were appalled by that awful, silent danger, more terrible than the loudest thunders of battle.

Two young men approached leisurely. One was distinctly a soldier—erect, handsome, dashing. Denis O'Hara was a typical dragoon. His companion—a man tanned by exposure to all sorts of weather, wiry, agile, with not a particle of superfluous flesh—was as unmistakably a traveller—a wanderer in many lands—a sojourner in none. His free-and-easy gait, his very attire, proclaimed the fact. They came up, chattering and laughing together. Captain O'Hara spoke gaily:

"This is my friend and old school chum, Miles—the great Fred Miles, traveller, explorer, mighty hunter of big game from the Himalayas to the Rockies. He turned up as I was turning out, so I brought him along."

Then something in the old men's faces seemed to strike him; his own changed.

"What's wrong, Colonel?" he cried quickly. "Is it—is it Kathleen? Is she ill? Let me pass!"

He was rushing forward, but Colonel Bertram caught his arm firmly.

"Denis, my lad, I must speak to you before you can see her," he gasped. "She's well, but—steady yourself to bear it—she's in deadly peril."

The young soldier gave a hoarse cry.

"Where—where is she? What is it? Let me go to her." He was struggling to pass; but all three held him now, he looked so desperate.

"Listen, my dear boy," implored the

Colonel. "More depends upon your coolness than you think; you must not startle her—life and death are wavering in the balance. The least touch, the slightest show of feeling, and death will turn the scales."

Wide-eyed with horror, the young husband heard the tale of his wife's awful position. The danger seemed to freeze his very blood, to turn him to stone with the anguish of it.

"Unless she could stand the agony of red-hot pincers, I can think of nothing to kill the infernal, devil-possessed creature. There is no surety in any other plan," said Dr. Kelly at last; and O'Hara gave a shuddering moan; the Colonel drew his breath deeply. Suddenly the stranger spoke—very quietly.

"Why not shoot the beast?" he asked.

His question sent a thrill through the hearers. O'Hara turned fiercely upon him.

"And kill my darling, too," he cried hoarsely. But the other met his furious glance calmly.

"No, she need not even be grazed," he answered coolly; "and demon or no demon, it's the safest way."

His calmness had its effect upon the listeners.

"Who is to do it? I'm a fair marksman; but, heaven help me! my nerve is gone now," cried poor O'Hara, the great tears rolling down his haggard face.

"I will do it, Denis, if you'll trust me," Miles said quietly. The Colonel and Dr. Kelly gripped each a hand, too much moved to speak, and O'Hara gave one great convulsive sob.

"God bless you, Fred. Trust you? There is no man on earth I can trust as I trust you," he said brokenly, and his friend nodded.

"I always carry this," he said, drawing a revolver from his breast pocket. "I can't get over the habit, even in civilised countries. Lucky I don't," he added gravely.

The colonel touched O'Hara.

"I'll go for her, and get her out with Elinor," he said. "I'll break her danger to her; the sight of you would be added torture to the poor child.

Kelly and you see the manager, and arrange where it is to be done; then come back here to guide us. Explain as much as is needed, but not all—for mercy's sake not *all*, only enough. And keep cool, lad—think of her and keep cool, for it's life or death, remember."

Without hesitation he was obeyed. The three men hastened away, and with a prayer in his heart, Colonel Bertram opened the box door.

But the moment he entered he knew there was no need for explanation. His wife lay back in her seat, half-fainting, while Kathleen, her hand resting on the ledge of the box, turned a white, helpless face towards him; she was unable to utter a sound. He bent over her tenderly, speaking calmly.

"My love, we are going to save you," he whispered. "Come with me to Denis; he knows all. Be brave and calm, and don't move your arm."

She rose at once. Her lips quivered, but she made a mute sign of acquiescence. Mrs. Bertram, seeing her husband, hearing his words of encouragement, sat up, her wonderful self-control asserting itself, even in her mortal terror. Her husband addressed her:

"Come, Elinor, we must be brave," he said, and led the way out, just as the hum and stir around announced the falling of the curtain.

But it was not O'Hara who awaited them outside; the manager himself stood there. He hastened to explain.

"It has leaked out that Fred Miles is in the house; some one recognised him. There's a perfect mob round the room where I took him first. We must go to the wings; there's a ten minutes interval. It's best done there—there's space and light. Follow me, please."

He evidently knew what was intended, and was anxious to help. He glanced with a shudder at the reptile, but was careful to show no symptoms of fear or disgust by words.

Soon Kathleen found herself in a great wide space, the centre of a circle of strange faces. She was conscious of nothing save that Denis was not there. She heard the suppressed screams, and hysterical sobs of women, the hoarse exclamations and eager questions of men; but she gave no heed. All her

numbed senses were concentrated upon that fearsome creature, holding her spellbound. For now, excited perhaps by the glare of light, the serpent had raised its head, and was slowly swaying it from side to side, while its body seemed to become more vivid with anger; its fangs played continually, darting out and in, and its glittering eyes grew more menacing. As it turned restlessly, its gaze seemed to encounter hers; she could not withdraw her eyes from it. A mad impulse seized her to lift that smooth, flat, gleaming head, and lay it caressingly against her cheek. Suddenly there came a woman's terrified cry:

"Merciful powers, it is fascinating her! Quick! oh, be quick, or she is lost! See, she moves her arm!"

Kathleen heard neither cry nor words, nor the stir they caused, but she felt a strong, gentle hand upon her cheek, heard a quick, steady voice, a man's voice, say clearly:

"Turn your head, your husband wants to see you," and the gentle hand drew her head round firmly. She raised her eyes to see Denis close beside her, his face pale as death, but his lips trying to smile. He did not offer to touch her, but once her eyes had encountered his, she never withdrew them.

"Stand clear—ready," said the calm voice behind her. There was a rustle of garments, a sharp click of steel, a flash, a loud report, and puff of smoke over her face, and she had fallen sideways into the arms ready to receive her—her husband's.

"She is dead! she is gone!" several excited voices cried, as the actors and actresses crowded round.

"No, no, she's only faint—quick with the brandy," cried Dr. Kelly, now cool and alert.

The spirit revived her, she opened her eyes, but clung to Denis with a faint scream.

"Kill it, kill it!" she cried, recoiling in renewed terror, staring at the floor.

On the spot where she had stood, something like a fragment of variegated whip-cord lay. Head and tail had been blown to atoms, but the reptile's body still writhed and trembled as if with impotent rage. Not for long, however.



"STAND CLEAR—READY!"

With a fierce oath Colonel Bertram set his heel upon it, grinding it savagely down till nothing remained but a grey powder, like the ashes of a burnt-out cigar.

"Fred, how can I thank you for saving her?" O'Hara said, with quivering lips.

"No thanks to me, Denis, lad; your wife's pluck saved herself," answered Miles, quietly pocketing his revolver, his face aglow with honest admiration.

As Denis, carrying his wife and followed by the others, disappeared, the manager spoke a few words to his Company, in a curiously choked voice.

"Ladies and gentlemen, had that little scene been acted before the audience it would have brought down the house. The man is celebrated the world over for his coolness and pluck, but the girl beat him to-night—*hollow*."

And the audience, waiting for the curtain to rise on the second act, were amazed to hear a ringing cheer from the wings as it went up.

"You would not have believed this, I suppose, if you had not been one of the principal actors?" said Colonel Bertram, as the four men sat smoking, after Kathleen, affectionately tended by Mrs. Bertram, had retired.

Fred Miles sent a long curl of smoke upwards.

"Why not?" he asked gravely. I have had some queer experiences before now, have seen some strange things in barbarous and semi-civilised countries—things that if I put them into my books would make the scientific, up-to-date world call me a liar and lunatic to my face. No, I'm not surprised; but where and how did you come across the devilish creature?"

"In a stall in Cairo. I fancied and wanted to buy it, but the old Arab wouldn't sell. He declared it wasn't a stone as I imagined, but a real asp that had been enchanted and put to sleep thousands of years ago. He asserted it would wake into all its old vitality and deadly power when a woman warmed it into life. I laughed, of course, he was hoaxing me I thought,

to get more money. I offered him more, but he wouldn't take it. A while after I was near the stall again, and found a new occupant there. The old man had died suddenly, and his nephew had annexed his stall. The nephew readily sold the 'Asp of Cleopatra,' as the old Arab had called it. My wife hates serpent ornaments, so I kept it myself till to-day, when it fell out as I searched my private stores for something else. The rest you know."

"Ah, well," the creature is settled for all time now, and, thank heaven, once Mrs. O'Hara gets over this awful shock (as she will by and by) there is no likelihood of another scare," said Miles.

"Thank heaven, not from the 'Asp of Cleopatra,' at any rate," said the Colonel, laying aside his meerschaum and rising to say good-night.

"Of course the theatre people knew nothing of the real facts of the case?" observed O'Hara tentatively.

"Nothing; I discovered that their idea was she had been experimenting with a torpid snake, so I left them in that belief," answered the Colonel grimly.

Dr. Kelly laughed slyly.

"You didn't want the newspaper men, the naturalist, the hypnotist, the scientist, and all the other 'ists' down upon you in a body like a swarm of locusts, Eh, Colonel?" he said, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"You've hit it, Kelly—I wanted to cheat the whole confounded lot out of 'copy,' or 'new facts,' or 'startling confirmations,' and all the rest of it," was the old soldier's dry answer. "Good night, you fellows, and forget all about that cursed creature as soon as you can. I'll never say 'snake' I believe, as long as I live."

"Amen to that," said Denis O'Hara, fervently, and the other men nodded with silent understanding.





Vacancies to Order!

WRITTEN BY R. ANDOM, author of "We Three and Troddles," "Martha and I," "Side Slips," etc., etc. ILLUSTRATED BY SYDNEY ALDRIDGE.

IT was Mac who told us the story. We were loolling about the studio as usual—Slater, Mackenzie, Murdoch, and myself, and our presence and occupation would have been a perpetual and insurmountable blight on the owner had he relied upon any actual work for his income. But Mac didn't. A purblind public and a deaf and dim-sighted race of editors between them contrive to keep Mac handsomely in return for his insolence and a casual contribution of shaky and erratic lines on odd bits of old cardboard which Mac calls his "picchewers," and we describe variously as "not half bad, old man," or "rot," according to our mood.

Slater began it! Slater had heard of a rattling good billet on the weekly *Comfit* just two months too late to get it, and he had been dwelling rather bitterly on the rough luck which had deprived him of a chance of getting £450 per annum for doing nothing daily, instead of doing it for nothing as he had been for the past five months.

Previous to that Slater had had a passably decent billet on a religious weekly which filled him with contempt, even though his effusions filled its pages. The manner of Slater's enlargement is so characteristic of Slater that I venture to digress just to detail it in brief.

Well, one day when Slater had been

more than normally irritated by a move on the part of his proprietors which they deemed politic and Slater didn't, he protested in no measured terms.

"Mr. Slater," said the proprietor in suave, measured tones, "that is our concern. If we choose to adopt *any* plan of operation, and we are willing to pay for it, surely we are free to do so, without consulting yourself, for instance."

"Yes, I suppose so," murmured Slater; and then with that terribly icy incisiveness that makes most of us very careful indeed how we ruffle Slater's prejudices, he added: "but it prevents one from having anything like a complete sympathy with that certain man who went down to Jericho and fell among thieves."

"Why?" queried the puzzled proprietor.

"Because he did well," said Slater spitefully. "He might have come to Navy Street and fallen among fools, you know."

But to return to the matter in hand. I had casually enquired if the man who had taken the place Slater might have had was robust, and I had suggested that Slater might make his acquaintance and take him out cycling.

"Or," said Mac, from his place of rest on his back on the couch, "you might adopt the scheme of Jubbins."

"Who was Jubbins?" we enquired, "and what was his scheme?"

"Jubbins was a friend of mine, and an ass," began Mac.

"Of course," quoth Slater; "that goes without saying. Birds of a feather, you know."

Mac slung a palette-rag at Slater and knocked a bit of his own property into everlasting smithereens, which was good and fitting, and exactly as it should be.

"I was saying," continued Mac impressively, "before I was interrupted by his stable companion, that Jubbins was an ass. He was an ink-slinger in a small way of business, also."

"For a time this contented him, and then he took to hankering after the flesh-pots of Egypt and fell. He didn't call them flesh-pots. 'A snug little billet on the *Boomerang*, my boy,' or 'A cosy corner on the *Curler*,' was generally his direct and picturesque allusion to what he thought he most required. But all these little niches were filled by men with cast-iron constitutions and a morbid love of life and occupation that rendered any idea of suicide or resignation absolutely silly in connection with themselves. So Jubbins went on yearning, in the intervals of turning out short stories or doing an occasional assignment for a weekly he had an outside connection with."

"Left to himself, Jubbins was harmless enough. He hadn't the wit to devise things, let alone put them into operation; but in Cranely he found just the element he required to make a dangerous combination."

"Stephen Cranely, when I first knew him, was a medical student. I used to call round on him in his chambers in Chelsea when I had a fit of the blues on and felt a special desire for something frolicsome. There was always positively certain to be a skull or a hand well in evidence, on which Cranely was working up questionable details concerning joints and ligaments or something, and sometimes on rarely fortunate days I would drop in when there was an arm or some other piece of anatomy undergoing dissection."

"Many fellows, precisely on this account, fought shy of Cranely's chambers. They said they had no objection

to meeting their fellow-creatures in rational ordinary everyday intercourse, but they decidedly did object to visiting anywhere where odd fragments were liable to be pushed on one side to make room for the tobacco-jar; or where the host would say:

"'Excuse me, Twiddy, old chap! I'll just shove this foot out of the way, and that will make room for your hat.'"

"I don't mind these things much myself, or at least I didn't use to in those days, and I used to spend a good deal of my leisure time in Cranely's company, partly for that reason and partly because we had many ideas in common."

"In the first place, we were both impecunious, with that chronic impecuniosity that knows no pay day and teaches the victim to dodge his tailor by instinct and to lie to his landlady with a brilliance and variety not to be met with in any other stage of life."

"There are several other things that we were together, Cranely and I; but it is not worth detailing them here and now. Certainly we were a first-class pair of young fools, one living by his wits and the other by his pencil—which means the same thing, only that it has a more respectable and reputable sound about it. This balance of credit, it is perhaps unnecessary to explain, rested with me; but there was one thing Cranely possessed by way of compensation which far out-balanced any superiority I could lay claim to. He was the glorious owner of the finest, the most unique, and the most attractive phase of madness that it has ever been my lot to witness."

"There was nothing of the lunatic about Cranely that was perceptible to even more than casual acquaintances. In fact, fellows who called themselves his friends used to remark that his capacity for borrowing odd five-pound notes and evading their just restitution in due or any other season betokened a shrewd and hardened business intellectuality as well as a darned unprincipled impudence, even though they agreed that he was too clever for a professional career and too lazy for a commercial one."

"His phase was to my mind evinced by an absolute and callous disregard for

others. He had the instincts of the vivisector, and the tender-heartedness of the baby-farmer—not wantonly cruel, mind you, but absolutely indifferent in attaining his ends whether he was cruel or kind. That is my idea of madness, or moral obliquity, which is the same thing running in a different direction.

"Jubbins was a later arrival than myself. In fact, I believe I introduced him to Cranely; but they hung together so closely when they did come to know each other that I speedily got to be an outsider.

"Well, one evening we were sitting together in Cranely's room, amidst the usual ghastly paraphernalia and medical student's books, which described all manner of gory horrors in picture and letterpress on every other page. Cranely had just begun to take an active interest in germs then, and it was a rather trying thing to keep up the relationship during the time it lasted. That very evening, I recollect, while Jubbins and he had got absorbed in some abstruse problem anent the working of the brain, I had discovered a pot of red currant jelly, and was getting interested in that on my own account, with a paper-knife and some mixed biscuits, when Cranely awoke to the nature of my occupation, and summarily interrupted it.

"He seemed rather annoyed about it, and said I had swallowed the finest pot of 'cultures' he had so far succeeded in rearing. He didn't know exactly what the 'cultures' were, but if they were not cholera, he was pretty sure they must be yellow fever or something tropical of that sort. I endeavoured to soothe him by pointing out that however much he might regret the affair he couldn't be justly held responsible for it, and I tried to comfort him by the assurance that as I was fairly robust and germ-proof, I might get through right enough.

"'You?' he queried in blank astonishment. 'Oh, you be hanged. I was thinking of the "cultures," not you. They are expensive, and take no end of trouble to rear, and now you have gone and upset my work for the past five months.'

"And I was his friend, too!

"There was no doubt about Cranely's madness! I said as much, and I intimated that a big, strong, grown-up man ought to have some better occupation than doddling round pollywogs. Jubbins sided with Cranely, and in the argument that ensued, he became almost as offensively devoted to the dirty research as Cranely himself. I thought it was just to spite me at the time; but later I came to believe that an idea was slowly developing in what passed with Jubbins as his intellect.

"Anyway, I know they became trying enough between them over the craze, and I began to drop off. I don't care for that sort of thing, personally, and I could have barely tolerated it in them had they been a bit trustworthy and careful over it. But they weren't! They would mix things up and forget where they had put them, and at last you couldn't take a bit of bread and cheese in their company without running the risk of having one of them start speculating as to whether the cheese we were eating was the edible cheese, or the winter quarters of something new, and costly, and precious in the germ line, that had lately come over from the South Seas, or India, or somewhere. They would argue it out between them in a cold-blooded, indifferent fashion, while I sat with my bit of cheese poised on my knife awaiting in agonised suspense to have it decided whether I had eaten Cheddar or Cholefoouperloloos, or something simple like that.

"They usually left it to me to determine. If at the expiration of ten days cold shiverings with flushed countenance and rapid pulse, and symptoms of tetanus set in, with an expiring scene in awful agony three hours later, then I could be very well assured that I had swallowed a Cholefoouperloloos, etc.

"It never did, and I began to get case-hardened after a time and take molecules and 'cultures' and other oddments of this nature philosophically, though I think both Cranely and Jubbins experienced one or two distinct disappointments over my providential escapes. Once when I did go a bit sick, shortly after a dubious banquet of Cranely's providing, they both came rushing round in intense and ghoulish

eagerness, and they seemed to hold me responsible when my doctor pledged them his word that it was only the influenza. But I am straying."

"You are, very much so," quoth Slater. "What has all this jargon of microbes and animalculæ and incipient sawbones to do with my affair or your assinine friend, Jubbins?"

"Well, there is as much connection as there is, ordinarily, between a hard frost and a pair of skates," said Mac. "To wit :—

gummed little bits of pale green jelly on to the fringes of his MS. Even then I didn't grasp the nature of his manœuvre, and Jubbins didn't enlighten me.

"He talked instead of some snug and remunerative appointment that was looming for him in this or that direction, and when I suggested that it was already filled Jubbins laughed sardonically and lit a fresh cigarette. He began to take a keen interest in the obituary notices of the literary papers too. And then I tumbled, though I couldn't take



"HE SCANNED THE PAPERS"

"Some few weeks after the pollywog mania had reached its limits, and was on the wane as far as Cranelly was concerned, Jubbins matured his inspiration. He laid in a stock of 'cultures' of various brands on his own account, and hunted up some of his rejected short stories and 'doctored' them. It was interesting to watch his process of cultivation, and many a night I sat and smoked in his rooms and looked on while he jabbed his morphia syringe into essays, sketches, and poems, and

Jubbins seriously, especially as for a long time nothing came of it. I suggested that the soil was uncongenial, and that no self-respecting microbe could live happily and do good and useful work cramped up in the stifling piffle which was Jubbins's normal standard of production.

"Of course Jubbins repudiated this suggestion indignantly; but, all the same, I repeat, nothing came of it until —"

Mac left off here and went, or pre-

tended to go, to sleep. That is Mac's ordinary way of telling a story—a sort of “his funeral's to-morrow” style of climax.

We waited a bit, but no sequel seemed to be forthcoming, so we set out with a walking-stick and a sofa cushion in search of one. Mac surrendered at discretion!

“Jubbins's endeavours had been chiefly directed against the *Musel*,” he said, with an irritating drawl. “He bombarded that unfortunate editor with yellow fever, and scarlet fever, and milk-blue fever, and magenta fever, and cholera, and other ‘cultivations,’ and they lost no end of readers, besides two office boys, three printers, a postman, and the office cat during the siege. And then the editorial chair fell vacant and Jubbins got it.”

“What a villainous thing,” said Murdoch indignantly.

“What a thundering lie,” said Slater, who is of coarser fibre and fond of truth, naked and forceful, and doesn't mind lending her expression at a pinch.

“Jubbins was editor of the *Musel* for a fortnight and three days,” persisted Mac. “He might have gone on a bit longer only he inadvertently sat down on a germ which had escaped and was wandering round the editorial chair. It was a typhus germ of notoriously

savage disposition, and it sprung at him and bit him so that he died and was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery. For further particulars see small handbills.”

The other fellows were wild with Mac, especially Slater, who said he knew of a handier and more direct way of clearing out vested interests and creating a vacancy. He said he rather fancied Mac's job, and would give a practical demonstration there and then.

It was done with a cudgel, he told us.

“Stay a minute and then let the execution proceed,” said I. “In the interval, Mac, would you very much mind telling us what became of the original editor of the *Musel*? Was it germs or otherwise?”

“I don't really remember,” quoth Mac with a grin; “but I rather think it was August holidays. Any way, if you don't believe me, I will introduce you to Jubbins himself, and make him tell you the story.”

“But,” said I, in blank astonishment, “what about that savage microbe, and the grave in Kensal Green, and the pathos of it?”

“Oh, get out,” said Mac. “How the deuce do you think a fellow can do any work with a parcel of lazy loafers hanging round him like this? Clear off, I say—this isn't the casual ward.”



THE AUTOMATON.

WRITTEN BY REGINALD BACCHUS AND RANGER GULL

ILLUSTRATED BY A. WALLIS MILLS



ABOUT the middle of this century public interest in the game of chess received a remarkable impetus from the arrival in London of a man named Greet, a Jew from Poland, who brought with him an automatic chess-playing figure. This figure had been first exhibited at Prague some six months before, and its subsequent tour of the great cities on the continent of Europe had excited an extraordinary interest. Most of the best-known masters of the game had taken up its challenge in St. Petersburg, Paris and Vienna, but one and all had suffered a defeat, inexplicable in its suddenness and completeness.

Mr. Greet now announced that his figure was ready to play against, and beat, any one in England who should care to oppose it. The Automaton (for this was the name that the public had given to the figure) was exhibited a number of times in London, and on each occasion a crowded and mystified audience witnessed the uncomfortable spectacle of an image made of wood and iron, defeating in an easy and masterful manner several well-known exponents of the most difficult game in the world.

The machine consisted of a large

figure of wood, roughly hewn and painted to resemble a man. It was about twice the size of a full-grown human being, and when playing was seated in a chair made on a very open design. It was quite motionless, except for the jerky movements of its arm and of the two long steel pincers that served it for fingers. It made no sound save the one word "check," that rasped out from its wooden throat, and the final "check-mate," pitched in a higher and more triumphal key.

This soulless machine was a master of all the known gambits, and seemed to play them with a supreme inspiration not granted to any living professor of the game. Public excitement about the matter was acute, and speculation ran high as to the probable methods employed to bring about so marvellous a result. Every facility was afforded to the public for inspection. Before and after each game the figure was opened in full view of those among the audience who might care to come upon the stage, and the closest scrutiny revealed nothing but a mass of cogs and wheels, among which it was quite impossible for a man to be concealed. Moreover, Mr. Greet was quite willing to allow the Automaton to be moved about on the stage at the direction of its opponent, so that

the theory of electrical communication with a player concealed beneath the platform, had to be abandoned by those who had conceived such an opinion. During the games, Mr. Greet sat or walked about on the stage, but two members of the audience were always accommodated with chairs by the chess table, and it was obvious that there could be no communication between the figure and its proprietor. In this way the public mind became unpleasantly harassed, and Mr. Greet's purse grew to a comfortable fullness with the entrance money of the hundreds who blocked the door at each performance. The uncanny nature of the whole affair attracted numbers to the spectacle who did not even know the moves of the game, and many a man set steadfastly to the learning of chess, and the baffling of the problems proposed in the weekly papers, that he might better comprehend the nature of the mystery that was puzzling London.

So with a *clientèle* composed of professors and amateurs of the game, engineers and scientists, and the great General Public that loves a mystery, Mr. Greet might have remained in London for a long period of great pecuniary satisfaction. Then, without any warning, it was announced in the papers that the Automaton had made its last move, for the present at any rate, in the metropolis, and would shortly set out on a tour through the principal towns of the provinces.

Birmingham, Manchester and all the great centres of the North and Midlands were visited with the usual triumphs, and one morning the public were startled at their breakfast-tables with the brief announcement that Mr. Greet would back his Automaton against any chess player in the world for £2,000 a side, the match to take place in the Theatre Royal at Bristol within three weeks' time.

No one had been more completely mystified or more intensely amazed at the triumphal progress of the Automaton than Mr. Stuart Dryden, considered by most people to be the leading chess player in England. He had himself refrained from hazarding his reputation in a contest with the thing, for, after

carefully watching the easy defeat of those noted professors who had been bold enough to put its skill to the test, he had been forced to confess that in this machine, by some unfathomable means or other, had been placed an understanding of the game that he could not hope to compete with. He felt, however, that a time must come when he would be obliged to court the defeat that he knew to be certain, and the growing nearness of the contingency embittered every day of his life. He worked ceaselessly at problems of the game, and studied with the greatest care the records of the matches that had been played against the Automaton, but he found it quite impossible to coax himself into the least degree of self-confidence.

Professor Dryden was a bachelor, possessed of a small regular income, which he had always supplemented largely with his earnings at chess by way of stake-money and bets. He was a man of solitary habit and lived much alone in a small house in the north-western quarter of London. An old woman attended to all his wants; he was surrounded by a large and complete library, and between his little house and the St. George's Chess Club he spent almost the entire portion of his life. It was his custom to rise early every morning, and after a long walk in the Regent's Park to arrive at the Chess Club about noon. There, as a rule, he stayed till about ten o'clock of the evening, when he would return to a quiet supper and several hours with his books.

On the morning that Mr. Greet's announcement had been made public to the world, he left the house very early indeed, before the arrival of the daily papers.

On this morning he was in an exceptionally bad temper. He was by nature a sullen man, and the continued triumphs of this Automaton, that pointed to a probable reduction in his income, had been gradually making him more and more sour. Then, to complete his misery, he found last night, on his return from the club, that by the failure of a company, considered sound by the most sceptical, his small private

means had been reduced almost to a vanishing point. All night long he had lain sleepless with anxiety, and as he tramped the Regent's Park this morning his head burnt feverishly and his heart was very bitter against the world. The glorious freshness of the morning kindled no spark of happiness in his morose mind, and the children who met him stalking along the path ran nervously from his dour expression. He examined the future with care, but could see nothing but ruin before him, as what now remained of his private income would be quite insufficient for his support. Moreover, in confident expectation of a successful season at the chess-table, he had of late allowed himself many extravagancies, and his creditors were beginning to put unpleasant pressure upon him. Several tournaments, from which he was confident of gain, had been put off, since all interest was centred in the Automaton, and a mere contest between man and man fell tame after the almost supernatural strife with Mr. Greet's image. Poor Mr. Dryden was unable to compose his ruffled temper or to suggest to himself any plan for the future, and wearying of the monotonous greenness of the park he turned his steps towards the club, though it was much earlier than he was wont to go there.

The St. George's Chess Club was a temple sacred to the upper circles of chess-players. The social or financial position of a member mattered little, but it was essential that he should be a real expert in the practice of the game. In this way a very motley and cosmopolitan gathering was usually to be found in the comfortable club-house situated in an inexpensive street near Hanover Square.

Mr. Dryden walked straight upstairs to the smoking-room, and was astounded to find it, usually so empty in the morning, quite crowded with an excited throng of members. All of those present had attained or passed the middle age of life. Every face carried some strongly-marked personality, and a rapid conversation was being carried on in different languages.

Mr. Dryden was inexpressibly an-

noyed. He had promised himself peace and had found chaos, and his ugly face assumed a still more repulsive expression. He looked the very embodiment of friendless old age; a sour, tired old man whose death would conjure a tear from no single eye.

A little Frenchman was the first to notice Dryden's entrance. He leapt to his feet and waved his hand towards him.



"THE VERY EMBODIMENT OF FRIENDLESS OLD AGE"

"*Tiens, Dryden!*" he exclaimed; "*voilà notre sauveur.*" The babble of the room stopped at the words, and all faces

turned to the door. The old man stood there, slowly furling his umbrella and looked enquiringly round. Then he spoke slowly.

"You will pardon me, gentlemen, if I do not quite understand. "Why saviour, and of what?"

"Why, *our* saviour! We're going to try for Greet's dollars," drawled a voice from the corner. "You're the only man for us. We'll put up the chips."

"Once more I am at a loss," said Mr. Dryden; "M. Laroche and Mr. Sutherland, you have puzzled me. I presume you are talking about the only Greet that interests us. What new thing has he or his Automaton done?"

Twenty members shouted the explanation, and, half smothered in newspapers, Mr. Dryden was forced into a chair, and formally asked if he would act as representative of the club and take up Mr. Greet's challenge.

"It has beaten all the rest of us," said the President sadly, "but surely in the first chess association in Europe there must be one player who can get the better of that infernal machine. There *shall* be one, and you shall be that one, Dryden. You can take a line through this. I know by exactly how much you are my master, and that thing showed about the same superiority over me. So you'll start about square. This is the scheme we've arranged. The club finds all the money if you lose. If you win, you take half and we pocket the rest. That's fair enough, is it not?"

Mr. Dryden did not take long to decide. However sure he felt that he was no match for the mysterious intelligence that guided the hand of the Automaton, the temptation of the money, and his own straitened condition left only one course possible to him.

"I accept," he said; "make all arrangements in my name, and let me know time and place and anything else that may be necessary. For these three weeks I will shut myself up. If there is anything about the game that I do not already know, perhaps in this absolute seclusion I may wring it from my brain. I suppose that I shall see you all, or most of you, on the appointed

day. *Au revoir*, gentlemen. I thank you very much for the honour you have done me."

The members rose in a body, a motley crowd of all nations, each one greatly excited, and congratulations in every tongue smote on the back of Mr. Dryden's head, as, shielded by the President, he walked sedately down the staircase.

Left to himself, he set out in the direction of Charing Cross, for he entertained the notion of paying a visit to an old friend in the country. This gentleman, the Rev. Henry Druce, was incumbent of a village cure in Kent, and though his name was unknown to the public, he enjoyed among the professors of chess a high reputation as a master of the game. In the seclusion of Mr. Druce's peaceful vicarage Mr. Dryden felt sure that he would find rest for his worried brain, and valuable suggestions for the work that he was to do.

The train wandered happily out of the suburbs into the pretty county of Kent, and after many tiresome waits drew up at last at a tiny wayside station, all white in a gorgeous setting of many-coloured flowers. The glare of the sun's rays that beat back from the glowing platform into Mr. Dryden's tired eyes staggered him for a moment, as he stepped out of the gloom of the carriage. The hot quivering atmosphere was very distinct to the eye, like the hot-air waves that one sees above a shaded lamp. The country was full of dull, murmuring noises, and among them the voices of the porters and the rumble of the train seemed indefinite and unreal.

Mr. Dryden was unable at once to assimilate himself to the new surroundings, and long after the train had banged over the points and glided away into the haze he still stood looking vaguely over the broad fields, scattered with lazy cattle, that lay against the railway on the other side. He was startled into consciousness by a voice asking if he wished to travel on the omnibus that was about to start for the village. Following the man to where, in the dusty road, a boy in a big straw hat was lazily flicking the flies from the two

sleepy horses that stood dejectedly in front of the little yellow omnibus, he was presently jolting into view of the scattered houses of the hamlet. The vicarage was an old-world house in an old-world garden, and as Mr. Dryden walked up the white-flagged path to the porch, he was afforded a view of Mr. Druce, comfortably disposed for his afternoon nap in a long chair by the window. The vicar was, however, delighted at the intrusion, and very excited by Mr. Dryden's tale of Greet's challenge and his own acceptance. They talked for a while about the mysterious figure and its inexplicable victories, till suddenly Mr. Druce, who throughout the conversation had been somewhat hesitating and shy of manner, turned to his visitor and said :

"It appears to me that in London you have ceased in a measure to enquire into the reason for these wonders. You are beginning to accept the victories of the Automaton as inevitable, and to believe, I am amazed to find, that the thing is in reality an almost supernatural triumph of science. Now surely, Dryden, you cannot think that that steel hand is guided by any other than a human intelligence. It is absurd ; you might just as well believe in magic and the black arts. I have not seen it, but I read, and am told, that facility is given to the audience for examination ; that it is opened, and is apparently empty of aught save machinery ; that it is detached from the stage or its chair ; in fact, that its secret is so clever that every-one has been baffled. Now it is quite plain to me that somewhere, either inside it, or close at hand, is a man, possibly unknown to us all, but obviously a chess player of extraordinary brilliance, who by some means or other plays the Automaton's game. That is quite certain. The problem is, therefore, who is the man ? The names

and the movements of all the great players are known to us through the papers. I can tell you in a minute where is Iflinski, or Le Jeune, or Moore. Besides, there are not half-a-dozen men in the world who could have played the games so far recorded. Now I have a theory. I am a good Christian, I believe, both by profession and practice, and I have hesitated long in my mind before I was compelled to believe in this theory of mine. It brings me to think evil of a man who has been my friend, and were I not so certain, Dryden, I would never breathe it to a soul. You are the first to hear. Listen. Of course, I long ago gave up the supposition of a wonderful scientific discovery, or anything of that sort. Since then I have simply been trying to find out the man. I have compared the games played by



"COMFORTABLY DISPOSED FOR HIS AFTERNOON NAP"

Mr. Greet's figure with those played by most of the greater living masters, and I have found in one case a striking similarity. Even then I should not have spoken had not coincidence aided me still further ; had not, in fact, my friendship for the man I suspect enabled me to follow his movements and be privy of his disappearances. It is—and I am grieved that he should have lent himself to such a deception—Murray."

Mr. Dryden gave a gasp of astonishment.

"Murray!" he said, "Philip Murray of the Queen's Library, the bibliophile, the old white-haired gentleman who comes sometimes to the club and plays a game or two. I can hardly believe it, Druce."

"It was hard for me to believe it myself," said Mr. Druce, "and I have only told you half of what I know. In my mind the truth of the thing admits of no doubt. I will tell you more of my proofs."

"But the man couldn't have done it," broke in Mr. Dryden; "he couldn't have beaten these men, he couldn't have played the games. I've seen him playing in the club, he is no extraordinary player. No, Druce, find some one else for the spirit of the Automaton."

"Don't be so impatient, and don't be led astray by the idea of Murray's incapacity," said Mr. Druce. "You don't know him properly, neither you nor any one else at the club; but I do. He cares nothing for notoriety. Chess is his recreation, not his business; but I can tell you, Dryden,—and many hundreds of games have Murray and I played together,—that he is the first master of the game in England. Enough for his ability. Listen to these facts. How long ago is it that the Automaton was first exhibited in Prague? Eight months exactly. At that time Murray disappeared from England and was absent for six months, precisely the length of time that Greet was taking his figure through the big cities of Europe. The fact alone of his disappearance may be only a coincidence, but look at this. My sister Lizzie's husband is at the Embassy in Vienna. She saw Murray three times in the streets during the time that the Automaton was there. She mentioned the fact in a letter to me, because, she said, he seemed to avoid her in so strange a manner. Tom Rollit, writing from Antwerp, told me how he met Murray in a *café*, and how constrained he seemed. The day was the second day after Greet and his figure had begun their matches in that city. I didn't pay much attention to this at the time,

but after the Automaton had come to London, and I had repeatedly called on Murray to have a chat about the thing, and been as often told that he was away, I became suspicious. He is a man who has all his life been most reluctant to leave his home, and after the first time that in my study of the games I had noticed a resemblance between Murray's play and that of the Automaton, my suspicions became very strong. It was then that I remembered his several journeys to Europe just before his long absence. He has always professed an extra distaste for continental travel. I remember too, how I had met Edouard Roulain, the man who has had such an extraordinary success in Berlin as a prestidigitateur, in the hall of Murray's house on the occasion of one of my visits. When I asked him about the man—for I should like to have met him—he changed the subject at once and somewhat rudely. Again—it is really wonderful how so much circumstantial evidence has come my way—he was in Manchester when the Automaton was there. I was calling, and I could not help noticing that the maid who showed me to the drawing-room carried a letter addressed in his handwriting, that bore the postmark of that town. Mrs. Murray put the letter quickly in her pocket, and when I asked her where her husband was, she told me that he had gone to Edinburgh about a book. You must agree with me, Dryden, that that is enough. Well, I've got one last proof, the most conclusive of all. When they went to Birmingham, I followed and took a room that commanded a view of the stage door of the hall. All day long I sat in that window, concealed by the curtains, and every day, sometimes only just before the show, sometimes two or three times during the day, I saw a man, heavily bearded and with spectacles, walk into the hall, with Murray's walk. Once I saw him with Greet, but generally he was alone. That that man was Murray I have no doubt at all. He is the brain of the Automaton. Philip Murray has worked one of the biggest deceptions on the world that has ever been conceived, and I doubt not he has nicely feathered his own nest in the

working of it. What do you think of my story?"

"I own that I am fairly astounded," said Mr. Dryden, "and I cannot think how it is done. I tell you I have looked inside the thing, from both sides, and it's full of wheels. I've pushed it about the stage; and I've sat there during the play and never taken my eyes off it."

"Did Greet let you put your hand inside and touch the machinery," said Mr. Druce.

"Well, I never thought of doing that, nor, when I come to think of it, did any one else; but I saw wheels, and cogs and springs, as distinctly as I see you."

"That can be arranged by an elaborate system of mirrors, some improvement on the Pepper's Ghost idea. Edouard Roulain is quite clever enough to fool any one by a trick of that sort. It's my belief that Murray gets inside it, I don't think it could be worked by any other means. I expect that the plot was conceived somewhat after this fashion. Edouard Roulain, in the course of his investigations, stumbled on a really exceptionally brilliant idea for an optical delusion. It then occurred to him that this idea might be put to more profitable use than mere exhibition. How he hit on the notion of the chess-playing Automaton, I can't think. He has been a friend of Murray's for some time, I found that out; and very likely he told Murray of his find and asked for suggestions. Murray may have got it from some old book, or perhaps thought it out himself. Wait a minute though, I never told you how I proved Roulain's connection with the affair. When the Automaton was in London, I met him repeatedly about the town; but that was before I was so sure about Murray, and I didn't think much of it. He had grown a moustache, but I recognised him easily. I daresay he's gone now, he wasn't in Birmingham."

"What about Greet?" said Mr. Dryden.

"Oh, he is only a figurehead; perhaps he doesn't even know the secret. He has been an operative manager all over Europe and the States; he took Roulain to New York when he made his

first great success there. He is about the best business manager they could have."

"Well, I suppose I must grant you that Murray does work it—exactly how he does it doesn't matter much. What I want to think out is, how does this knowledge help me? Suppose that you or I give the thing away, what do we gain? Have you thought of doing it yourself?"

"No, I have not. To tell you the truth, I have rather been enjoying the joke, and were it not for my orders, I should have in time thrown down the gauntlet myself. If there is one man in England who knows Murray's play, it is myself, and I think I might have got the better of him. The feeling of mystery that has surrounded the Automaton has helped him immensely; he would not have had so complete and easy a success if his opponents had not been frightened out of their best game. I could see that by studying the records of the play. As it is, I shall do nothing; but if this knowledge will be any help to you in your game, you are most heartily welcome to it. Believe me, that I shall so far escape from my seclusion as to be a most interested spectator of the match at Bristol."

"I am immensely obliged to you, old friend," said Dryden; "I will make it no secret from you that I am in a very bad way for money. A totally unlooked-for misfortune has deprived me of the greater part of my regular income, and the interest that has followed this Automaton has caused several of the important tournaments, that I should have made money out of, to be abandoned. If I can win this match, I get £1,000, which will set me straight, and from my victory I shall gain a reputation that will put me in the way of much future gain. If I were to write a book on chess, it would enormously enhance its sale."

"I am sorry to hear of your distress," said Mr. Druce, "which I had never suspected, and I am the more glad that I may be of a little use to you. You will stop to dinner, of course, and before you go I will give you the records of a great many of Murray's games. He has had enough of his mysterious

triumph, and it is quite time the joke came to an end."

Dinner was quiet and pleasant, and though the presence of Charles Cunliffe, the curate, who was fresh from Magdalen, and cared for nothing except stamped leather bindings and the fine embroidery of a cope, excluded chess from the conversation, the three men found the subject of continental travel a convenient exchange for opinions. Mr. Cunliffe had in undergraduate days paid several visits to Boulogne, and held elaborate ideas on the subject of racial distinctions.

Mr. Dryden bade farewell to the two clergymen in the little station, now cool and pleasant in the moonlight, and during the seventy minutes of his journey to Charing Cross, examined feverishly the bundle of papers that Mr. Druce had given him.

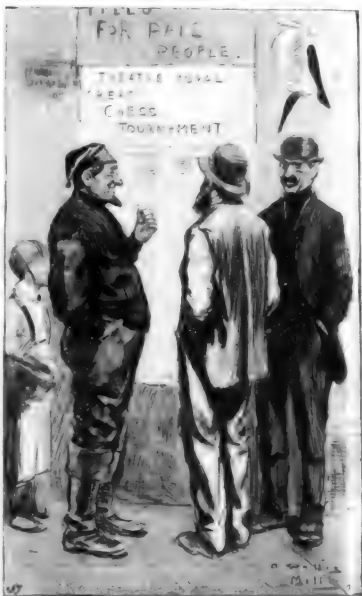
For the next week he kept himself strictly from the world and held unceasingly to his task of investigating Mr. Murray's methods. At the end of that time there came to him the conviction that he had met his master. As before he had known that the uncanny spirit of the Automaton would surely beat him, so now he realised with a pain—all the worse because it swept away the hopes that Mr. Druce's story had inspired—that in the brain of the little old Scotch librarian was the same power, none the less real now that it had lost its odour of mystery.

Meanwhile his creditors had become more instant in their demands, and poor Mr. Dryden, crushed with despondency and overwhelmed with debt, conceived a hatred towards the automatic figure and its inmate that increased in bitterness as each day brought him nearer to the contest which

he felt certain would prove his Waterloo.

For the three weeks he kept entirely to his own house and held no communication with the outside world, except for a short correspondence with the President of the club on the matter of the challenge, and the arrangements for day and hour. He received one short letter from Mr. Druce, wishing him good fortune and assuring him that he would be among the audience to watch the downfall of the Automaton.

Whatever mistrust of his powers he might entertain, it was not his own



"THE COMING MATCH HAD AROUSED EXTREME INTEREST IN THE TOWN"

money that he would sacrifice by abandoning the match, and in the interests of the club he was bound to go through with the affair.

Four days before the match he came to Bristol and took apartments in a house in the Hot-wells, that faced the river. The coming match had aroused extreme interest in the town, and crowds were continually assembled about the station at Temple Mead, in hope of a prior view of the Automaton.

On the day after his arrival he sat for many hours at the window, watching the tall spars of the ships show stark against the cliffs as the vessels were towed to and from the city. The chatter of the riverside loafers that reached his ears treated always of the Automaton, and the improbable speculations that were hazarded brought a weary smile to his face. About sunset he left the house, and, following a winding path, climbed the edge of the gorge, coming out upon the Clifton Down. For a little while he sat there, watching the silent beauty of the scene. The dying sun had lent a greater glory to the city that sloped from the sides of its seven hills to the hollow beneath him, and the Avon traced a line of rosy flame through the gorge, till it lost itself at last in a forest of masts and the dull smoke-cloud of the furnaces. Then the sun seemed to grow in size and rush quicker to its bed. For a moment it hung over the Somersetshire woods, firing every tree into a glory of a moment. Then it was suddenly gone, and the white coolness of evening came directly over the country and the town. The majesty of hill, champaign and valley, lent an infinite composure to the trouble of Mr. Dryden's thoughts, and presently he began to take the road to the city, purposing a cheerful dinner at some inn. A merry party of travellers filled the coffee-room at the "Greyhound" in Broad Mead, and their amusing conversation about the Automaton induced Mr. Dryden to disclose his identity. He became the centre and hero of the party, and two hours passed with a pleasant speed.

About nine o'clock, a little rosy with wine, he set out on his way homewards. The mischance of a random turning led him from his proper road, and presently

he came out upon the open space of the Queen's Square. The comfortable freshness of the air invited him to stay, and he sat for some time upon a convenient seat. He had come into a pleasant reverie, in which the Automaton played more the part of a comedian than of the villain, when a rumbling noise lifted his eyes to the roadway. A large cart of the strangest conceivable shape, somewhat like the body of a grand piano set upon its edge, was being driven past. It swung round the corner that led to the theatre, which was close at hand, and he heard it clatter for a little over the cobbles before it came to a sudden stop. He had a strong idea that this must be the arrival of the Automaton, and without quite knowing why he did so, got up and followed. On reaching the theatre he saw the cart drawn up a little beyond it. He hesitated to go nearer, and then noticed that the gallery door stood a little upon the jar. In a pure spirit of adventure he pushed it back and made a difficult progress down the long dim-lit passage and up the dark rickety staircase. When a plump of cold air upon his face told him that he had won the entrance into the body of the house, he made his way delicately to a seat and sat awaiting possibilities. He was not long in suspense before he heard distant voices and a considerable noise of a heavy body being advanced over rollers. Then a light came out from the wings and went across the stage. It seemed a tiny speck of flame in the great blackness of the theatre, lighting little save the face of the man who carried it. Mr. Dryden made out a heavy moustache and concluded at once that this must be Edouard Roulain. The man stooped and lit a few of the centre footlights, which turned a square patch of light on the stage. A hand lamp was burning in one of the wings, but through the rest of the house the darkness thickened backwards till it wrapped the gallery, in which Mr. Dryden sat, with an impenetrable gloom. Presently the noise of rollers began again, and two men came into the patch of light, pushing the great painted figure of the Automaton.

One, a person of ostentatious figure,

he recognised immediately as Greet, and with a thrill of excitement he realised that the other, a little bearded man of a peculiar gait, could be none other than Murray himself. The language of the three men was deadened by the distance, but he saw that the one whom he supposed to be Roulain was busied about the mechanism of the figure. When the clicking of the wheels stopped, Mr. Murray walked up to the figure and spoke a few words to Greet and Roulain. Mr. Dryden could not hear distinctly, but a loud laugh came from the two men on the stage. Then Mr. Murray took off his coat, opened the Automaton and stepped inside it. Presently its arm began to move and the steel pincers of its fingers to shift about on the table.

He was only inside for a few minutes, and as soon as he reappeared, Mr. Dryden, in the fear that they might make it a business to see to the closing of all doors, began to fumble his way out of the theatre. Providentially the door of the gallery entrance was still open, and when he had gained the street, he hid in a doorway a few yards distant from the stage entrance. The men were talking as they came out, and he recognised Murray's voice at once. "That will be all right, Greet," it was saying; "you had better come and see me in the morning. I am staying in Bedminster—42, Leigh Road; it's across the river, you must take the ferry."

They passed down the road, and when they had gone out of sight, Mr. Dryden began his journey back to the rooms in the Hot-wells.

Though nothing had been revealed to him that he had not been already cognisant of, the fact of having been with his own eyes privy to the secret of the trickery, made him greatly excited. He was conscious of a distinct hatred for Mr. Murray that he had not before experienced. There was something of jealousy in his anger. He bitterly grudged the old librarian his invention of the Automaton and the money that was coming to him from its exhibition. If he could only beat it, he thought, and then the dreadful feeling of hopelessness, that had left him during the varied excitements of the last few hours,

came back and beset him with redoubled force. The much-needed repose of sleep was denied him, for all through that night the nightmare figure of the Automaton was with him in his dreams, and when, late next morning, he left his bed, his face was drawn and haggard and his mind a maelstrom of hatred and despair.

The day was very wild for the season, and continual thunderstorms gathered and broke their fury about the crags of the Avon Gorge. Mr. Dryden did not leave the house, but watched from his window the thunder-clouds drive through the funnel made by the cliffs, and scatter over the houses and fields beyond. He felt a companionship in the ill-humour of the elements, and the shrieking of the wind played a fantastic accompaniment to the bitter theme of his thoughts. Hatred of Murray was echoed in every scream of the gale, in every splash of the driven rain against the window-panes, while the roaring menace of the thunder fashioned his anger into an ever-growing self-confidence. All through the afternoon, as the rage of the storm grew stronger his spirits rose higher, and at dinner a brilliant idea came to him. He would surprise Mr. Murray in some quiet place on his way to the theatre, and make known to him his discovery of the trick. The knowledge that the secret was out, coming to him at so critical a moment in the career of the Automaton must, he felt sure, have a deterrent effect on Mr. Murray's play, while his own knowledge that within the painted figure his invisible rival was uneasily fearful, would lend a confident strength to himself.

The prospect of meeting the spirit of the Automaton in the flesh awoke other possibilities in his mind, and at first he cursed himself for not having conceived a plot for the kidnapping of his antagonist. However, it was now too late, and he dismissed the idea with the reflection that even had he thought of it before he could have with difficulty found trustworthy accomplices. About half-past seven he set out for the meeting that he promised himself. The gloom of the day had in no way abated and it was already quite dark. What

he had overheard of Mr. Murray's conversation with Greet suggested the river ferry to him as an advisable place, and there, about eight o'clock, he commenced to wait. The match was to be played at 9.30, and the doors were not open to the public till half-an-hour before that time, so he judged it quite certain that Mr. Murray would start for the theatre some time between eight and nine. The loneliness of the place lent horror to the storm, but Mr. Dryden cared little for the drenching rain or the flaming lightning as he staggered against the wind to keep his post by the ferry. Some twenty minutes had gone when a vivid flash lit the surrounding scene into half-a-minute's uncanny radiance, and he saw the figure of a man detach itself from the black shadow of the houses and come to the top of the river bank. Then all was dark again. The wind blew him the sound of a familiar voice shouting for the ferryman, and through the noise of the gale he seemed to recognise the rasping intonation of the Automaton's "Check." A lighted doorway gave up another figure carrying a lantern, and he could just see the two grope their way down the greasy flags that led to the boat. The tide was nearly at its lowest, and long oily rolls of mud sloped from the roadway on either side to where the last of the ebb hurried on its race to the sea. The power of the current made the crossing a long one, and he could only see the intermittent twinkle of the lantern through the rain. For a long way it moved slowly up the stream and then edged gradually back towards the opposite landing place. There was a grating noise, the chink of a coin, and Mr. Dryden saw the figure of a man that limped a little come laboriously up the difficult path. He waited in the shadow, and when Mr. Murray came full into the light of the lamp that marked the ferry-place, stepped forward and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Ah, Murray," he said, "we are well met; for though this evening brings us another meeting, I had rather I found you here. I have a matter to discuss with you."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the other, in a voice that shook with ill-

repressed astonishment. "You have made a mistake. I do not know you, nor is my name Murray. I beg you will excuse me, I am about a business that presses."

"Don't be foolish, Murray," said Mr. Dryden. "I tell you I recognise you; you've as much time as I have for a talk."

"Again, sir, I repeat that you are wrong," said the other. "I am not Murray, and your interference is impertinent. Good night."

"Oh, you aren't Murray, aren't you; you think to face it out!" said Mr. Dryden; "but I know you, you fraud. What about these?" And, making a rapid step forward, he caught at his companion's beard with both hands. It came away at once, jerking the spectacles with it. They fell and shattered on the pavement.

"Now are you Murray?" shouted Mr. Dryden in a voice of passion. "Damn you, you *shall* own it! I've found out all about you and the Automaton trick, and I've come here for a little business talk. If you'll only be sensible, we can soon come to terms."

"You have discovered my identity and you have me at a disadvantage," said Mr. Murray. "What do you want of me? Tell me quickly, for the time presses."

"There can be no match till I come, so you needn't hurry," said Mr. Dryden. "Listen. I must have that money, and it's just possible that you may beat me. I didn't come here to threaten, only to frighten you out of your play by discovering my knowledge. It was your refusal to acknowledge yourself that gave me the idea. Now here is my proposal. You let me win, and I say nothing; beat me, and I expose you. An exposure would cost you a lot more than the £2,000 you lose to me."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," said Mr. Murray; "you make a great mistake if you think you can bully me. I had known you, Mr. Dryden, as a gentleman of good manners and repute. I am sorry to find out my mistake. You may do your worst, prove the trick if you can. Now let me pass."

"You refuse then; well, you shan't go.



"THE FACE SHOWED WHITE ABOVE THE BLACK WATER."

Curse you, Murray, I must have the money. Don't struggle or I shall hurt you. Oh, you will, will you? Take that, then."

Swinging his heavily-mounted stick, he struck the old librarian a crushing blow behind the ear. The old man fell headlong, and, rolling over, came upon the mud slope. Down this he began to slide, gathering force as he went, till Mr. Dryden, who was watching, aghast at his action, saw the stream catch the feet and swing the whole body round into the river. For a second the face showed white above the black water. Then it was gone into the darkness.

For a short time Mr. Dryden stood thinking. He found to his astonishment that he knew no remorse. One

thought alone possessed him; that now he must win the match and the money. The conditions of the game distinctly stated that, should the figure make no move, the victory went to its opponent.

He gathered up his victim's hat, and the false beard, from where they lay on the ground, and stuffing the dripping hair into the hat, flung it out over the river. Then he turned and walked quickly towards the theatre.

Mr. Greet and Monsieur Roulain arrived at the theatre a few minutes only before the time appointed for the match. Roulain unlocked the door of the Green Room, which had been reserved for their private use, and they went in to find the Automaton ready seated in its chair. They both con-

cluded at once that Mr. Murray, as was his habit, had arrived earlier and was already concealed within the figure. Roulain contented himself with opening the outer panels, in order to make sure that his invention of mirrors revealed nothing to the public but the accustomed mass of machinery. When he was satisfied he rapped twice upon the back of the figure, and after a few seconds an answering knock came back to him. It was the signal he had arranged with Mr. Murray. Then, summoning two attendants, he had the Automaton wheeled on to the stage. Directly afterwards the curtain was raised, discovering to the audience, that thronged every corner of the house, the solitary figure of the Automaton in its chair. Mr. Greet stepped forward to its side, his comfortable figure resplendent in an evening suit that glittered with jewels, and after bowing unctuously in response to the plaudits that rang out, made a little speech in which he recapitulated briefly the conditions of the match. He finished with the usual invitation to the audience to come on the stage and examine the figure. This ceremony was quickly disposed of. People throughout the country had come to accept the mystery of the Automaton, and flocked to the performances merely as amateurs of a new sensation, without seeking to further probe the secret. Some score of folks, chiefly of the lower middle class, sought the nearer view that the stage afforded, and after Mr. Greet had courteously delayed the over-inquisitive fingers of a countryman from Clevedon, he retired, to appear again with Mr. Dryden.

Mr. Dryden, whom the action of the storm had reduced to a condition of unhealthy dampness, appeared in a spare suit of Mr. Greet's, which hung upon his angular figure in a succession of unexpected creases and folds. The audience, unprepared for this element of the grotesque, mingled their applause with a ripple of merriment; but Mr. Dryden, in whom the conflicting emotions of triumph and fear waged an incessant battle, was entirely unconscious of any influence outside his own brain. He bowed to the house and cast a look

of surveyal across the floor and round the tiers. In a box that overlapped by some feet on to the stage, sat Mr. Druce, a little hidden by a fold of curtain, the ample contour of his face creased into a twinkle of expectant merriment. Mr. Dryden paid him a mechanical salute and then became conscious of Mr. Greet's voice proffering an introduction to two gentlemen of the press who were to occupy seats upon the stage. He shook hands with the politeness of habit and sat down amid a silence of attention, so great, that the concerted breathing of the audience came upon his ear with a distinct and regular ebb and flow of sound.

The mood of simple curiosity with which former spectators had watched the Automaton's triumphs was on this occasion changed to an intense fervour of interest that threatened in many cases to lapse into hysteria. When on former occasions competitors had climbed the platform, like yokels at a village fair sheepishly certain of defeat from the professional wrestler, the public had speculated pleasantly on the probable duration of the contest, and been content to laugh and wonder at the unusual spectacle. But this was no matter of a lightly-accepted challenge, or of an end which admitted of no serious contemplation. Here were two thousand pounds a side at issue, and the picked chess player of England set down to do battle for fame and fortune against the all-conquering intelligence of the wooden sphinx.

Mr. Dryden sat, his wrists resting lightly upon the edge of the table, gazing intently into the calm features of his lifeless *vis-à-vis*.

The thing was immeasurably unpleasant.

Little attempt had been made to conceive more than the roughest image of man. The forehead sloped backwards, and the long crooked nose that rose above thin tight-set lips and a hard chin had a flavour of the American Indian, while the whole aspect of the morose, seated figure, one arm clasped to the body and one poised forwards with half-bent elbow, conveyed a haunting suggestion of some hawk-faced god of Babylon. A cold sweat came over Mr.

Dryden's brow as his nervous fingers stretched over the chessmen, for he was to make the first move. The full disaster of his affairs was unpleasantly real in his mind, and something burning seemed to press on the back of his eyes. Then the scene on the picture-sheet of his brain shifted to the ferryside, and as he saw again the tide catch the body of Mr. Murray and whirl it out to sea, self-recovery came to him at once. He straightened his arm and advanced a pawn upon the board. As he did so the familiar click of the released mechanism of the stop-watch, brought an aspect of custom, and he sat back in his chair in the tranquil knowledge that the end of the time limit would find the Automaton still motionless, and the wager his. Behind it, at a little distance, sat Greet, in a like comfortable confidence, while the two pressmen, their bodies bent forward, their hands clasped between their knees, brought near to Mr. Dryden the air of intense excitement that hushed the silent hundreds at his side. The stop-watch had marked four minutes when there was a creaking noise in the Automaton. First the shoulder and then the elbow began to move, and to Mr. Dryden's unspeakable horror the pincers of the hand unclasped, and, poising for a moment, clipped the Queen's Pawn and rapidly moved it forwards. The murderer's face grew ashen grey with fear, his eyes blinked rapidly and his heart stood still.

His first thought was that Murray was not, after all, the guiding spirit of the Automaton, that he had killed an inoffensive man for no reason. He heard again the dull sound of breaking bone, and the sucking noise of the rolling body on the mud. He could think of nothing else, till the far-away voice of the umpire, announcing that four minutes had gone, pricked his brain into a little consciousness. He hastily stretched out his hand and made a rapid, unconsidered move. As he did so his fingers came for a brief moment in contact with the iron paw of the Automaton, and at the moment of touching he knew who his adversary was. He felt so strange and terrible a message flash to his brain that his whole body became cold and rigid in a moment.




"MR. GREET NOTICED SOMETHING STRANGE IN MR. DRYDEN'S ATTITUDE"

He could not keep his eyes from the lens-like eyes of his adversary, and he felt rather than saw the intelligence that looked out at him, for he knew he was playing with no earthly opponent.

He made another disastrous and hurried move. Then the head of the Automaton trembled, the lips parted, and it said "Check" loudly and distinctly. The voice was Mr. Murray's voice.

At the end of the five minutes Mr. Greet noticed something strange in Mr. Dryden's attitude. Going hastily up to him, he saw his eyes were wide open but without sight, and when he touched his hand it was cold and stiff. Mr. Dryden was quite dead. The curtain fell, and they carried the body to the green room, while in a terror-stricken silence the vast crowd left the theatre. Their last footsteps were still echoing on the other side of the curtain when Greet and Roulain came back to the stage. The doctors and attendants were trying to restore the body of Mr. Dryden in the little room at the back. Greet opened the panel of the figure and called in hoarse, agitated tones to Mr. Murray to come out. There was no answer, and Roulain fetched a candle and they looked into the hollow in surprise. There was no one there!



THE SECRET OF THE PYRAMID.

WRITTEN BY FRANK ANDRIÓT CONDUIT

ILLUSTRATED BY M. NISBET

I.

YOU want to hear the story? Well, you shall. I have never told it to anyone in England yet, partly because in all probability no one would believe it, and partly because the relation of it would bring back the recollection of horrors that, even now, makes the blood run cold in my veins. I sometimes catch myself thinking whether it was not, after all, some terrible nightmare, but the sight of this ruby always awakens the memory, and I can recollect the affair as if it were only yesterday. I am an old man now, and my hair is white, 'tis true, but it has been white for thirty years—ever since that night in the Pyramid. This is the story. Listen:—

In the year 1860 I obtained an appointment as assistant overseer of some public works about to be started in Cairo by an English firm of engineers. I left London to take up the position in the best of spirits, as I was young then, and a residence in Egypt was the

fulfilment of my one great desire, being, at that time, a devout student of Egyptology, and the prospect of being able to visit the land of the Pharaohs filled me with the most pleasant anticipations.

There is little for me to relate as to the voyage; suffice to say that the time passed cheerfully enough. Fine weather and good company relieved the monotony of the journey, which, in those days, took considerably longer than it does now.

Travelling in the same ship was a young Englishman named Harold Crawford, the son of a well-to-do London physician, who was travelling to Egypt for a holiday, and, like myself, was an enthusiast on the subject of Egyptian antiquities, therefore it may be readily imagined that we were not long in forming an acquaintance which ripened into a close friendship before the voyage ended.

On my arrival at Cairo I immediately reported myself to head-quarters, but was informed that the works would not commence for at least another month, and consequently I was free to occupy my time as I chose, until operations

began. This was an unlooked-for piece of good fortune, as I knew that my friend Crawford had not yet started from Cairo, and the following day saw us seated together under the esplanade of The Hôtel de Khedive, planning an excursion to the Pyramid of Ghiza, the loadstar of all sightseers in that ancient land of wonders.

During our conversation Crawford mentioned a peculiar experience that had befallen him on the previous day. I cannot do better than tell it in his own words:

"Yesterday," he said, "as I was coming up the street, I noticed an old Bedouin, eighty I should think, if a day, who was feeling his way along the gutter. As I was passing by the old man said in broken English: 'Noble Effendi, you have the generous face. Your countenance speaks the charity that dwells within your heart. May it be so that you have studied the laws of medicine?'"

"This was rather curious I thought. How this old beggar could know I was a medical student puzzled me. To humour him I replied, 'Yes, I am a doctor' (rather far-fetched you know, as I haven't passed anything yet)."

"The old man looked at me for a moment, then said, 'Would your nobleness deign to look upon my daughter who lies afflicted close by? The God of my fathers will surely pour His blessings upon you.'"

"Somehow or other I felt a strange interest in this nondescript specimen of humanity, and bidding him proceed, followed his tottering footsteps. We turned down a narrow court close by, and in a few minutes reached a small house; a tumbledown affair with two rooms. Crossing the threshold the old man bade me wait a moment, and passed into the inner one. He soon reappeared and signed to me to enter. The apartment was a small one, meagrely furnished. A common deal table, stool, and low wooden bedstead were about the only things I noticed, with the exception of a few texts from the Kôran, pinned to the wall, and a curious inlaid ebony box standing in a corner.

"The patient lay upon the bed. A

young Egyptian woman of the usual type, but of rather prepossessing appearance, with her long, black hair spreading in a tangled mass over the pillow, in the centre of which her gipsy-like features glowed with the hectic flush of malarial fever, but not as yet of a malignant type.

"I saw at once that an immediate dose of quinine or bromide was all that was necessary to check the advance of the malady.

"'Will she live, Effendi?' spoke the old man, in a trembling voice. 'Will my daughter Zahiye still be the one hope of her aged father's short stay upon earth? I am beyond the age of ordinary men, and my time is drawing near, but with my loved one by my side I can face the terrors of Eblis without fear. Save her, Effendi, save her, and the day of wealth dawns for you!'"

"I promised the old man to send something that would soon put the girl on her feet again, and left him showering all manner of blessings upon my head. After leaving the house I stepped into Hart's and had a prescription made up, sent a messenger with it, and until an hour ago had forgotten all about the matter.

"As I was standing on this verandah where we are now sitting, a ragged urchin came up, and without a word presented me with this packet. After giving it me he took to his heels and vanished. I have looked it over carefully but can make neither head nor tail of it. Can you?"

The two pieces of dirty white paper that Crawford handed me were peculiar specimens of calligraphy. One was in the form of a letter, evidently written by the old Bedouin. After a careful scrutiny I managed to read it:—

"May God preserve thee, friend of the poor; thou who hast given life unto the one help and comfort of my old age, greeting!"

"It is far beyond the power of thy servant's servant to repay the debt he owes, but this much can he do. See thou the parchment; follow this to the end and thou shalt discover that which has escaped the hand of man. Seek and thou shalt find, but with this thy servant bids thee heed. When once the stone

turns thou holdest thy life at hazard.
Death lives within the chamber.

"Further guidance thy slave cannot give.

"HUSSEIN ABBAS."

"Now we come to the parchment," continued Crawford, as he produced a remarkable document which appeared to be a sort of plan or sketch traced in

at the foot of the parchment the representation of the entrance to the Pyramid with the passage leading to the subterranean chamber, then the one terminating at the King's Chamber, situated, as every student of Egyptology knows, exactly in the centre of the monument itself. Branching from this to the left in a slightly downward direc-



"WILL SHE LIVE, EFFENDI?"

rade outline upon something resembling sheepskin, but so old and worn as to be scarcely decipherable.

Spreading it before us we studied the rough characters, but could make nothing of it until an inspiration suddenly seized me.

It was nothing else but a diagram of the interior of the Great Pyramid, but containing more details than are known at the present day. It was simple enough to follow—first there appeared

tion, the diagram showed *another passage* ending in a square (evidently meant to represent an apartment) but almost before the line reached this spot the figure of a Death's-head had been drawn or painted (for it was in red) and stood out in bold relief upon the dirty crumpled skin.

My knowledge of what had been discovered in the Pyramids up to that time was complete, and I had no doubt whatever, that the document was in-

tended to show that there was a passage and chamber still unexplored.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Crawford, as I finished my inspection. "Is it worth going into?"

"Certainly," I replied; "it may be some stupid hoax, but nevertheless I must confess the thing impresses me, and I feel strongly inclined to see what truth there is in it. Who knows? stranger things have happened."

"Very well, then," said Crawford, "we will make a start to-morrow and see what the old chap's plan is worth. Keep the thing to yourself, and we will explore the place together quietly. It is no use taking any guides, I hate those fellows; besides," he laughingly remarked, "in the event of our coming across a hundredweight or so of gold or a pocketful of precious stones, there will be less to divide it among."

Poor fellow, how those words of his come back to me even now!

II.

By ten o'clock the following morning we were on our way to the Pyramids, those huge structures that for countless ages have bid defiance to time. They loomed up against the bright Egyptian sky—vast, solitary, grand.

I gazed upon the mighty monuments with a feeling akin to awe. Their immensity seemed to dwarf into utter insignificance every modern building I had ever beheld.

We were not long in reaching them, and both stood wrapped in silent admiration of their splendour, until our meditations were rudely broken by the noisy importunities of a ragged gang of Bedouins clamouring for "backsheesh" and acceptance of their services as guides. We had some little trouble in disposing of these unwelcome visitors, but after a liberal donation managed to send them away satisfied, and seated ourselves on a fallen block of stone to rest for a while before venturing into the entrance, a dark hole about six feet in diameter, which showed itself black and uninviting in the side of the Pyramid.

We had provided ourselves with some candles, a sectional steel crowbar, and

coil of strong cord in case of having to remove any fallen masonry, or to assist us in making a safe descent, should we be compelled to do so.

"Come along," said Crawford, rising from his seat, "let us make a start," and we entered the gloomy passage.

As we did so a most peculiar feeling came over me which I cannot describe. It was neither fear nor presentiment, but an undefinable sensation of uneasiness about I knew not what. A shudder ran through me, but the next moment I had shaken it off, and stumbled on over the loose stones and rubbish that lay thickly in our path.

As soon as we had proceeded far enough to be secure from the observation of anyone outside the Pyramid, we halted and lit our candles.

The flickering light threw strange fantastic shadows on the walls of the narrow passage which stretched away before us into the impenetrable darkness. The air, which had been so warm and soft outside, was now cold and dank, like that of a cellar.

On we went up the incline, the loose stones underfoot making our progress necessarily slow.

"Tough climbing this, old chap," said my companion. I started as he spoke. His voice sounded hollow and deathlike in the terrible stillness. "Not a very nice place for a ramble is it?" he continued with a laugh that reverberated through the passage like a shout of many voices. "Never mind, there's an end to it before long, I suppose, and something worth coming for too, I hope."

For another ten minutes we toiled up until the passage suddenly became level, and I knew that at least half of our journey was over. My previous study of what was already known of the interior of the Pyramid told me that we were now within a short distance of the King's Chamber, which was supposed to be the conclusion of the passage.

The way now became very narrow and we had considerable difficulty in making any progress, but in a few minutes we were at the end of it and entered the chamber, where we were enabled to stand upright and rest after

the labour of toiling through the dust and débris.

The hall we had reached was bare and cheerless, and the echo of our footsteps as we walked upon the stone floor sounded dull and hollow in that frightful stillness. The very air seemed dead and stagnant, like the atmosphere which sometimes precedes the bursting of a thunderstorm, and was cold and death-like as the grave.

Crawford got out the parchment.

"Strikes me this is a fraud," he said. "We've got to the end of our tether, I think, but still, as we are here, we may as well have a careful look round. Let us have another look at the plan first," and he spread the sketch open upon his knee.

There was the line indicating the way we had come and ending at the chamber we were now in. The other line commenced exactly on the opposite side of the apartment.

"Plain enough," said my companion; "but where is the entrance to this wonderful new thoroughfare? The walls are all solid stone everywhere. Let us try over there."

Holding our candles close to the stone we carefully scrutinised the side indicated by the sketch, but for a time could discover nothing. The massive blocks seemed to fit together as if in one piece.

Suddenly Crawford called out—

"Come here; let me have that crowbar a minute." I went over to him, screwing together the three sections of the steel bar as I walked. He was busy picking out the mortar from the side of one of the huge blocks.

"See here," he exclaimed, "this stone has been swung round at one time or other, because the little line of mortar only goes in a very short distance, and probably has been put there as a blind, to make it appear that this block is as firmly set as the others. We will soon see."

A few seconds later he had got enough of the mortar out to admit of the insertion of the flat point of the crowbar. Bracing his foot against the wall he grasped the bar and pulled.

Heavens! The ponderous mass moved at least an inch!

"Now then! Both together!" cried Crawford, and as we pulled, the stone slowly swung round upon its axis, disclosing a yawning pit, a black void, the awful gloom of which the light of our candles only seemed to intensify. I involuntarily drew back with a thrill of fear.

"There must be some way down there," said my companion; "get out the cord."

Fastening the line round his waist I held the other end while he cautiously crawled on his hands and knees to the edge of the chasm and, candle in hand, peered over into the darkness.

"It's all right, old chap. There are steps here. Come along, but be careful how you go." So saying he turned round and slowly began to descend, while I prepared to follow him.

There were scarcely twenty steps in all, and on arriving at the foot of them we found ourselves in a narrow way sloping in a slightly downward direction.

Our lights burned dimly in the gloomy, echoing passage, leading probably, to solitudes that had not been invaded for perhaps, two thousand years, and it was with a strange feeling of mingled awe and apprehension that I followed my companion, breathing the dust of a vast antiquity, and with uplifted candle vainly trying to pierce the inky blackness that lay before us.

The pathway was even and free from loose stones, enabling us to proceed with comparative ease, although our progress was slow, as we were treading upon unknown ground and knew not what pitfalls might be before us.

Crawford suddenly halted, stooped down and picked up something. Peering over his shoulder, I looked to see what it was, and uttered an involuntary cry of horror as the light of our candles fell upon the object he held. It was a human hand severed at the wrist; the flesh had mouldered away, leaving nothing but skin and bone. The horrible thing had the appearance of a claw, as the nails were long like talons. Upon one of the fingers glistened this ruby ring.

"Put it in your pocket, old man," said Crawford, "mine are full. The ring may be valuable," and handing me

the grisly object, he recommenced the journey. However, a slight pull slid the ornament from the bony finger, and I let the hand drop, putting the ring in my pocket. It is a very fine specimen of an Egyptian ruby, as you will see, and the setting is most elaborate.

Continuing on we at length came to

and won't stop *me*. Let us try the persuader again.

Once more the strange feeling of uneasiness seemed to come upon me, and my heart gave a convulsive leap as the crowbar clanged noisily against the metal lock, the blows of the heavy instrument resounding along the



"UPON ONE OF THE FINGERS GLISTENED THIS RUBY RING"

a massive wooden door crossed with heavy bands of iron, and as the light of flickering candles shone upon its panels, I saw with a thrill of horror the painted presentment of a huge skull and crossbones.

"Hallo! here we are at the door mentioned in the plan," said Crawford. "It is evidently only painted with the death's-head to frighten the ignorant,

vaulted passage like the thunder of cannon.

Crash! The cumbrous fastening at last gave way under the repeated onslaughts of Crawford's muscular arms, and the door suddenly flew open. A gust of stifling, foetid air belched forth, extinguishing both candles.

A moment's death-like silence ensued, followed by a strange sort of dull rasp

ing noise, as if a wet skin was being drawn across a wooden floor.

Then Crawford's voice rang out in an agonizing scream:

"A light! help! help! good God." Another instant and I had managed to get my candle alight.

At first I could see nothing. The sudden transition from pitch darkness dazzled my eyes. Then I looked again, and an awful terror gripped me. I stood staring and petrified.

A huge, yellowish, shapeless form, like a vast mass of wet, shining leather, was moving spasmodically forward from the opposite side of a square vaulted chamber. Two monstrous fiery eyes were fixed upon me, and the mass heaved and throbbed convulsively as it slowly advanced. The thing had some semblance of features. There was a horrible slit, which might possibly have passed for a human mouth, out of the corners of which dropped a stream of green slime. At the rear of this awful monster long tentacles, thick as a man's leg, waved in the air.

The body of my companion had been seized and crushed by one of these terrible arms which lifted the corpse on high and slowly swung it to and fro, like the pendulum of a clock.

All this happened in the space of a few moments. The unspeakable horror of the sight that met my eyes rendered me utterly powerless for the time being, then, my momentary paralysis suddenly passed into active fright, and I turned and ran headlong, dropping the candle as I did so.

I am not ashamed to confess it. The frenzy of fear obtained the mastery, and I tore back at full speed through the darkness, knocking and bruising myself at every step.

How or when I reached the King's

Chamber in the terrible darkness I cannot tell, but suffice to say, I did get to it, and with a superhuman effort, turned the massive block of stone again into its place. From that time until I found myself in the hospital at Cairo, my mind became a perfect blank.

They told me afterwards that I had lain hovering between life and death for nearly a month. At intervals a wild delirium would seize me as I again fancied myself in that fearful chamber of death, and after the madness passed, my very life trembled in the balance.

I must have lain unconscious in the King's Chamber for several days, as it was only through a party of English tourists happening to find me stretched (lifeless as they thought) upon the stone floor, that I am alive and able to relate what I have told you.

My account of the affair received very little credence. One or two attempts were made to discover the secret entrance, but without any result, and my story has been put down to the fancy of a disordered brain. I was pressed to accompany several search parties in order to point out the swinging stone, but nothing on earth will ever induce me to set foot in that terrible place again.

Poor Crawford's words, "There will be less to divide it among," ring in my ears even now, and in fancy I can again see that unearthly monster swinging my poor friend's lifeless body to and fro in its huge arms.

I have faced many dangers in my time both by sea and land, and fought for my life against overwhelming odds, but even the memory of that awful time fills me with unspeakable dread, as I look back upon our ill-fated attempt to unravel the Secret of the Pyramid.



The finding of Nitocris.

A SHORT STORY
OF PAST & PRESENT.

By M. HOEY.

ILLUSTRATED BY E. FAIRHURST.



EDWARD BERESFORD by name, was about thirty-two years of age, when I decided to go out to the Syrian desert to explore the ruins of

ancient civilisation.

From boyhood the history of those colossal nations of remote antiquity had enthralled me, and as soon as I had taken my degree at New College, Oxford, I had given up both time and money to the pursuit of Assyriology, till, at the time I am speaking of, I was accounted almost the first living authority on the subject.

Nor was I alone in my hobby, for Brian Maturin, an old college chum of mine, had caught the fascination of the subject from me, and was always ready to help with both brains and means.

Thus it came to pass that we two journeyed eastward together, after providing ourselves with all the Government passports, permits, recommendations, and such-like things that we could get.

Now, as I have often been asked since what first put this new whim into my head, let me state once and for all that it was the result of a dream. For one night I seemed to find myself in a

hall, whose architecture proclaimed it Chaldean, in which I moved as a spirit, seeing yet unseen. What I saw in that vision convinced me that there was a remnant of the Chaldees left, and what more fitting place to find them than under the ruins of one of their temples or palaces.

A dream, you say, is but small reason for undertaking so arduous a journey; but, my sceptical friend, whosoever you may be, let me but answer, "There are dreams *and* dreams, and perchance if you had been in my place, you would have followed my line of action."

But to return, Brian and I made up our minds not to set out empty-handed, but to equip ourselves with some of the greatest wonders of modern times.

Photographic apparatus, including Röntgen rays, might be of incalculable use to us; and, much to my friend's astonishment, I insisted on a large and exquisitely attuned grammophone also forming part of our travelling outfit. Last, and by no means least, was the medicine-chest, which contained some rare drugs over and above those ordinarily used in cases of fever and other Eastern disorders.

On our arrival in Syria, we sought and obtained leave of the Turkish Government to provide ourselves with

a force of twenty Arab warriors, who would both act as escort, and be over-seers under us in any excavations we might desire to make.

We further carried with us a letter from the Sultan, commanding all the Faithful "by these presents" to assist us to the utmost of their power.

We started then, with a train of ten camels and our bodyguard of Arabs, to cross the dry, sandy wastes of that desert where once had stood the wondrous cities of antiquity.

Then did the words of the prophet Ezekiel occur to us, in which he spoke of Assyria, "All the people of the earth are gone from his shadow, and have left him"; for where mighty Babylon once reared its proud head, now stand blocks of shattered masonry and bleak, yellow mounds, rendering the aridness of the desert, if possible, more noticeable by recalling to men's minds that formerly the site was graced with the Hanging Gardens which were one of the seven wonders of the world.

From some such reverie we were rudely awakened by the shrill cries of a party of Bedouins, who, judging from the number of our camels, doubtless thought we were worth robbing. A sharp skirmish ensued, in which two of the marauders got killed and one severely wounded. This last was left on the field by his comrades, and it was with some difficulty that I persuaded my Arabs to let me bind up his wound, and place him on one of the camels. Apparently the members of different tribes do not expect much mercy at one another's hands, for the poor fellow's gratitude knew no bounds for the simple service I had rendered him,

Brian undertook to keep an eye on the man when he was approaching convalescence, in case any mishap might befall him.

Riding by his side one day, he questioned him as to the ruin we were now fast approaching, and was told that it was haunted, a white form having been seen flitting through a passage, whilst music was at times heard in its vicinity.

This seemed to suggest a probability of my theory proving correct, so we made straight for the spot.

Birs Nimroud had already been the scene of extensive excavations, one result being the opening up of a long tunnel at the base of one of the towers, but up to the present no entrance into the building itself had been found. Through this we wandered slowly, to see if there seemed any spot likely to prove a door if excavated from the dust of ages. After some hours' search I saw the figures of two winged bulls, which I knew to have been most frequently placed at the entrances to temples.

Brian therefore suggested that we had better begin operations at once, to see if this conjecture would prove correct in the present instance. Doubtless the base of the first of the seven stories of which Bir's Nimroud formerly consisted was on a level with the floor of the tunnel, probably a means of egress resorted to in time of war. What remains of this structure is composed of burnt bricks, and we know that it was rebuilt by Nebuchadnezzar at least 504 years after its foundation. After two days' work, we were rewarded by finding a low doorway. This Brian and I resolved to open up without aid, nor did we have to labour long ere a mass of stone revolved slowly on massive hinges and we found ourselves in the vestibule which led to the great entrance.

Along this we made our way, presently to find ourselves in a huge hall, lighted with many hanging lamps of pure silver.

Before proceeding with my description, let me here state that Brian and myself had taken the precaution of dyeing our skin to resemble that of an Indian, as a European might find but short shrift at the hands of a Chaldee, if such there were.

But, to proceed. No sooner did we get into the centre of the hall, and feast our eyes on the marvellous frescoes on which were portrayed battle-scenes of 3,000 years ago, than we became aware of the subtle odour of incense, growing stronger and stronger, whilst a low sound of chanting, unlike anything I had ever heard, came nearer and nearer. We stood still, scarcely daring to breathe lest this should be but a dream; but no, for a massive silken curtain, em-

broidered with cabalistic figures was drawn aside, and seven old men entered the hall. Chaldeans these, without a doubt, they might have lived in the great king's time, to judge by their garments.

Their hair was in massive ringlets, their beards the same, whilst they wore on their heads the pointed caps one sees in Assyrian sculptures. Their robes were of costly silks, on which the emblems of their religion were thickly emblazoned in threads of gold, whilst the last to enter, a very Methuselah for age, carried a sceptre of ivory. Slowly they passed up the hall, seemingly not noticing our presence, and took their places at the farther end on thrones of cedar wood overlaid with bronze, and supported with four legs of ivory representing lions' heads.

The High Priest, for such he appeared to be, then rang a small bronze bell, and a younger man, in less costly garb, answered the summons. Evidently he was instructed to find out who we were, for he came towards us, and bowing gravely spake thus—

"By the Spirit of the air I conjure thee, by the Spirit of the earth I conjure thee, to tell me who thou art and whence thou art come."

"My lord, we have journeyed from a far land to seek out the wonders of by-gone ages, and if it were possible to find a remnant of those to whom the learning of the present world is but as foolishness, if so be that haply we might find any Chaldeans who would let us sit at their feet, and learn of them the wonders of the heavens."

I spoke in the language which I had learnt from the old inscriptions, and apparently it was correct, for the man moved back to the old priest and acquainted him with my reply.

After consulting the other six, he rose and beckoned us to go nearer. We did so, falling on our knees before his throne.

"Strangers, we have heard thee, but before returning any answer we must question thee as to the past of our nation, to see if indeed thy request is true."

"Speak on, my lord, and thy servants will endeavour to answer."

Then followed a string of questions as to their customs, religion, kings and such-like, most of which either Brian or myself were able to answer, thanks to our researches in Assyriology.

Whilst speaking, a girl had entered from behind the curtain. Her black hair was braided with gold, and fastened back by a circlet of the same precious metal; her gown was composed of fine white linen, having a broad band of purple at the hem, the waist being defined by another golden circlet, fastening in front with a sun of diamonds. To her the old priest turned when our examination was ended, bidding her send refreshments for two strangers who had come from afar to visit them. The girl gazed at us with true feminine curiosity, and I am bound to say our interest in this fresh arrival was none the less keen. I noticed that the younger Chaldean, Shalmanzar by name, frowned heavily when she bade us follow her to another room.

After partaking of refreshment from off dishes of gold, and drinking wine from goblets of pure crystal, the maiden evidently thought her turn had come to catechise us, and addressing herself to Brian, she asked his name and errand.

Now, as it happened, we had entirely forgotten to provide ourselves with names suited to our complexions, and Brian was at a loss what to answer. However, his Irish impulsiveness here stood him in good stead, for after a second's pause, he replied,

"Oh! daughter of the gods, thy servant's name is Brianus, and this thy servant," indicating myself, "is called Nimrash."

I devoutly hoped that I might remember that last fact.

We told the maiden, whose name she informed us was Nitocris, of the great Queen whose subjects we were, describing as best we could the gathering of all nations at her jubilee. Of course we called her the Empress of India, and succeeded in thoroughly interesting our hostess. She, in her turn, explained to us some of the ceremonial we should have to take part in, for which we were most grateful.

It must have been about midnight when Shalmanzar came to bid us to the High Priest's presence, and told us we were to be allowed to take part in the hymn to the divine Hea.

Brian did not know what to do, for he whispered to me that it was a clear case of idolatry, and his conscience forbade his taking part in it as such. I am afraid, much as I admired his courage,

"Ha ! sayest thou so ? What god is there who does not acknowledge Hea's supremacy ?"

"My lord, have patience with thy servant, if he recall to thy mind those words written on the wall of old, *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*,—It is the God of Daniel that I worship."

"My son, thou hast spoken well ; that prophecy indeed, was fulfilled, and far



NITOCRIS

I was distinctly cross with him at the time, for I feared the result of his refusal.

"Most gracious lord," he began when the old priest told us the part assigned to us, "thy servant, while deeply conscious of the honour thou dost confer upon him, yet begs thy indulgence in this matter, since the God of his fathers has forbidden him to sacrifice to any other god save Himself.

be it from me to speak against this, thy God."

So the matter ended, much to my relief and Brian's.

The ceremonial at which we were allowed to be present, though not taking part in it, was of the stately order that one would have expected from a religion whose followers have existed for more than 3,000 years. It consisted chiefly in chanting long litanies invoking the

various elements, and ending with a direct prayer to Hea himself. Libations of wine were also offered, incense was burnt in golden vessels in front of the golden altar of their chief deity.

After this was ended, we were allowed to retire for the night, couches being spread for us in another chamber.

Brian and I sat talking for some time, but only in whispers, not knowing how many ears the walls might have. We resolved to ask permission to fetch various articles from our camp the next day, and by this means to prevent any of our escort searching for us.

With some difficulty, our request was granted, and after being blindfolded and led out by some entrance we had never seen, we once more found ourselves in the Syrian desert. Our Arabs evinced surprise at our long absence, but we informed them that we had had a summons from one of the spirits who haunt the neighbourhood, to visit it again that same night, but by ourselves. By this means, we felt certain of keeping our followers from awkward investigations, since they have a mortal dread of ghosts.

This time, we took with us the photographic things and my gramophone.

As the sun sank behind the last sand-hill, we stood in the tunnel, by the door, and tapped seven times, when once again it opened to us. That night, the High Priest promised to show us some of the magic of which the secret remains a mystery to all Western nations to this day.

Whilst partaking of our evening meal, Nitocris told me (who by the way, was now the most favoured of the two), that there was an ancient prophecy that a white lord should come and reveal to her people mysteries unknown to them, and in return, if so be that a Chaldean maiden should, of her own free will, bestow her love on him, be initiated into the secrets of the past, and by some means restore the wisdom of the Ancients to the modern world, thus reviving their honour before the eyes of all men.

Such, as nearly as I can remember, were the terms of this decree, and to me it seemed as if the fulfilment might now be at hand. But one thing stood

in the way: it was quite evident to me, that Brian had lost his heart to this daughter of Chaldea, and I am afraid that it was equally clear that for her part she preferred me.

That night I spoke to Brian, and insisted that he should get the stain off himself, and appear as the white lord they were to expect.

The following day, when Nitocris brought us our breakfast in the smaller hall, Brian advanced to meet her, his face undisguised, and a brighter smile than ever in his dark blue eyes.

The maiden started, and asked with trembling voice what had happened.

"This has happened, O jewel of the East," responded Brian in his suavest tones; "thou didst declare to us that prophecy last night, and I resolved to deceive you no longer. I am the white lord that should come, and behold, I will show you unheard of mysteries."

"Why then, didst thou play a part, my lord?" asked the maiden.

"Because, lady, I knew not of this prophecy, and judged that I should be the more readily received if I came as an Eastern."

"I hasten to acquaint my father, then, of my lord's coming," and with a low bow, the girl vanished.

"I am afraid, Brian, there is trouble in store for you ere you win the girl. Shalmanzar will have to be dealt with, if I mistake not."

"He! why, Nitocris will not look at him."

"That, my friend, is of little moment if he looks at her. I only warn you; poisons and daggers are no new-fangled toys."

"Thanks, Ted, I will take care, though I have once or twice thought that you were likely to prove my most dangerous rival."

"I! No indeed; am I not the faithful friend of the white lord?" and I made a mock bow, to hide the tell-tale colour that rose to my cheeks, for I must confess my pulses beat quicker when the maiden was near, and it was only loyalty to the friend who had stood beside me in so many trials, and more than once saved my life at the risk of his own, that prevented my trying to win Nitocris for myself.

"Well, Ted, I am glad to hear it is so," he replied gravely. "Ah, here comes the priest."

"My daughter has brought me word that thou art the white lord; but thou must prove it, Brianus, or bear the punishment of a spy."

Brian seemed transformed in his new character, for drawing himself up to his full height, he replied haughtily,

"Know, oh priest, that I am ready to prove my words. Summon thy brethren, and let them tell me if there is one among them that can draw a picture of a man's skeleton so accurately, that if he have any bone broken, he can state the exact locality of the injury."

"Canst thou do this?" asked the old man anxiously.

"Summon all thy people, and thou shalt then see," came the dignified response.

It evidently impressed the Chaldean, for he hastened to obey the command, much to my astonishment.

Brian and I set about getting the Röntgen rays into working order, so that when Nitocris bade us follow her to the great hall, we had all in readiness.

One of the old men stated his willingness to have a representation made of his skeleton.

Upon developing the film we found the reason; the man was born with six toes on one foot.

Brian's reputation was firmly established after this, even Nitocris glanced less often in my direction. I entreated the High Priest to show us the magic he had promised.

"Is such thy pleasure, my lord?" asked he of Brian, entirely ignoring me.

Brian signified that such was his wish.

As I mentioned before, the old man carried an ivory wand. This he now proceeded to whisper over, ending with the words,

"By the Spirit of the air, I conjure thee."

"By the Spirit of the earth I conjure thee."

Scarcely had the words left his lips, than, to my horror, I beheld no longer a wand, but a great serpent, which twined its head lovingly round the old man's wrist.

Ah! you laugh, yet, on my honour as

an Englishman, I declare to you this thing is true. I cannot tell you how it was done, but both I and Brian saw it, without a shadow of doubt.

"Is it your desire to see any more?" asked the old man.

Brian again intimated that such was his pleasure.

"Then look upon me, and move not your eyes from my face," commanded the priest in clarion tones, rising to his feet and extending the ivory sceptre towards us. We obediently fixed our gaze upon him, and waited for the result. I am bound to say, that for my part, a cold shiver ran all down my back as I encountered the glowing light of his fierce black eyes, and Brian afterwards confessed to me that he felt precisely the same thing. The sage continued to glower upon us for some seconds in silence, then suddenly he broke into a low chant, at first so faint, that it seemed like the distant breath of wind in the pine-trees, then gradually swelling in volume till it grew into a majestic harmony, that rolled in mighty echoes through the vast and lofty hall. He swayed to and fro as he sang, his eyes gleaming like carbuncles in the dim light, whilst a strange white radiance surrounded his form. We felt paralysed, neither Brian nor I could move a step nor turn our gaze aside. Then all at once the weird chant ceased, and a thick darkness seemed to fall upon the hall.

"Look upon the rocky wall on your left hand," cried a voice like a distant trumpet, while we felt, rather than saw, the ivory sceptre pointing towards us. We looked, and behold! the mass of alabaster seemed to roll aside like a cloud of mist, and presently a picture was revealed to our wondering eyes.

The scene was Brian's country home in Ireland. We saw the picturesque old house of grey stone, bathed in glorious sunshine, the red-tinted Virginian creeper with which it was covered, waving to and fro in the breeze, while the birds chirped and fluttered on the roof. Then the door opened, and we saw Brian's mother come out with a letter in her hand. It was from her son, and we saw a tear course down her cheek as she read.

I heard Brian utter an exclamation, and instantly the picture clouded over, while the same trumpet-voice cried :

"It is thus that I read thy thoughts, O stranger!"

Then the thick darkness fell on us once more with a sound as of mighty rushing waters, whilst the ground rose and fell beneath our feet, and we seemed to be hurled to the floor.

When I opened my eyes, the High Priest was lying back exhausted on his throne, with his daughter bending over him, and Brian was sitting up on the floor looking at me with a rueful countenance.

When things had once more resumed their normal aspect I approached the throne and bent my knee, saying, "My lord, has thy servant permission to show thee one of the wonders of modern times?" The old man gave his assent, and Brian and I fetched the gramophone from the inner chamber, and placed it on one of the golden tables that stood in the great hall. At a sign from me, Brian began :

"Know, oh most wise among the ancients, that the God of Daniel is worshipped by the Queen of the land from whence I come; know also, that Her Majesty has reigned for more than sixty years, and, as was fitting on the sixtieth anniversary, she and her people assembled at the great temple of the capital, to raise a hymn of thanksgiving to their God. This chant you shall now hear."

The Chaldees gazed at each other awestruck, but said no word.

I tuned the instrument to reproduce the "Te Deum," and then moved away from the table.

Presently, there floated through the building those grand strains of organ, band, and voices that had once broken the stillness of St. Paul's, and moved by some spirit mightier than themselves, those Chaldees rose to their feet. Louder and louder pealed the organ, the trumpets blared forth their notes of triumph, and the voices of that magnificent choir rang through the building, where for ages had been heard only chants sung to heathen gods.

The effect was stupendous; involuntarily Brian and I blended our voices

with those issuing from that wonderful instrument, for the price I had paid in order to get one of the highest perfection, had not been wasted. It electrified even us.

When it was ended, a deep silence fell on the whole assembly, broken at last by Nitocris, who, approaching us, took Brian's hand in hers and placed it on her forehead.

This, I understood, was meant to signify that she acknowledged him as her lord and master, and I saw the fulfilment of that prophecy at hand. Shalmanzar saw it also, for he swiftly glided behind the girl, and when Brian put out his other hand to raise her from the ground, I saw the flash of steel as a blade passed under my unfortunate friend's arm, and he staggered back. I caught him in my arms and laid him gently on the floor, to see the extent of his injury. Like a tigress robbed of her young, Nitocris turned upon Shalmanzar and broke a phial of what proved a deadly poison, right on his mouth. It had all taken place too rapidly for any one to interfere, and the doomed man sank with a curse not a yard from where his victim lay.

Brian's wound was a nasty one, and I could not stop the bleeding. Unluckily, I had left my medicine-chest in the camp, and dare not leave him to fetch it. I explained this to Nitocris, who at once offered to go herself. Yet here another difficulty presented itself—would it be safe to allow the girl to go into the midst of the Arabs? If anything should happen to her, I should never know another day's happiness. I decided that the only thing was for me to go myself, and leave her in charge of her lover. The old man was much distressed at what had happened, and offered to bind up Brian's wound whilst I went for my things. Reluctantly I assented, and my mind once made up, requested them to show me the swiftest way out. This one of the old men did, this time without blindfolding me. I ran as fast as I could to my tent, secured the chest, and sped back again, having been gone under an hour. Imagine my horror at seeing Nitocris lying beside Brian with a wound in her arm. For a moment I thought there had

been some foul play, but I quickly saw my mistake. The old priest dreaded the white lord dying, lest a curse should fall on his people, and seeing how exhausted he was with loss of blood, had resolved that his daughter should save his life at the risk of her own. The blood from the girl's arm was flowing into Brian's veins, and gradually the livid colour of his face was resuming a more normal hue, whilst that of the girl was getting a dull grey. I could not look on at this, so taking a powerful stimulant from the medicine chest, I

learnt to love the girl whose life-blood now coursed through his veins. Thank God, I had strength given me to bear my pain in secret, but it left its mark, for though I am not yet forty, my hair is white as snow.

When he was strong enough, I told Brian how his life had been saved, and nothing would satisfy him but that I should fetch Nitocris to him, and the High Priest with her.

As they entered, he raised himself on one arm and held out his hand to the girl, who moved swiftly forward to find



"MY FRIEND WILL NEVER KNOW HOW I LEARNED TO LOVE THE GIRL."

forced it between the maiden's teeth, and then proceeded with the binding-up of her arm. I stopped the bleeding of both wounds with collodion, and soon my efforts were rewarded by signs of returning life in both my patients.

Gently I raised Nitocris in my arms, and conveyed her to another chamber, lest the sight of her should excite Brian. I told her she had saved his life, and a smile of content showed she understood. During the weary days that followed before he was well enough to leave his couch, my time was divided between the two.

My friend will never know how I

herself drawn close to his heart, whilst his lips sought hers.

"See," I said, controlling my voice as best I could, "the prophecy is fulfilled, for the Chaldean maiden, of her own free will, has given herself to the white lord."

The old man bowed his head, and laying one hand on his daughter's head, called Hea to witness that the day had come when, by the union of past and present greatness, wisdom should once more abound upon earth.

I then told him what Brian and myself had thought over, in reference to the fulfilment of the conditions of the

prophecy, namely, that we should establish a college for the promotion of Chaldean learning, in which these old men should be the professors.

Little more remains to be told. Brian and Nitocris now live half the year at that same college, to which the savants of the whole world resort, and for the rest spend their time at the home of the Maturins in Ireland, where I know a ready welcome always awaits me from my old friend and his lovely wife.

The college was built chiefly at my expense, for being a bachelor, and possessed of a large fortune, I could afford to gratify my desire for the furtherance of Chaldean learning.

Most of the other expenses, apart from the fabric, have been defrayed by the treasure of which the old men had been the appointed guardians, and which they placed at my disposal for the benefit of the college which was to restore fame to their ancient race.

On her wedding-day, Nitocris had given me a talisman of priceless value. It was a large ruby, on which was engraved the secret name of the god Hea, a charm which was said to have belonged to Nebuchadnezzar himself, having been given him by the Jewish Daniel. Certainly the characters inscribed on it spelt the word "Jehovah," whilst the potency of the charm has been tested frequently during my wanderings through the deserts, for in spite of Bedouins, fevers, treachery, and sunstroke, I have come out unscathed—owing, my Chaldean friends say, to that same talisman.

Of the purely technical outcome of my investigations, you will find the result in records at the British Museum, whilst the truth of this story can be verified by Brian and Mrs. Maturin, as well as by the professors at the Beresford College of Birs Nimroud.



THE WELL

OF OODMI SING

WRITTEN BY HERBERT COMPTON.

ILLUSTRATED BY GILBERT WALENN

IT was a suffocating hot-weather evening in May as Jack Glover stood in the verandah of his bungalow on the crest of *Kāladevi Pahār*, looking moodily down on his young plantation lying on the hill-slope below. His hands were plunged despondently in his pockets, and his face wore a look of gloom.

He was worrying over his tea-seedlings, of which he had planted out many thousands during the last year. There had been a six months' drought, and it had killed more than half his estate. The remaining plants were dying by hundreds daily, and there was still a month of the hot weather left before the Monsoon was due. Jack was speculating whether a single plant would survive to benefit by the rainy season when it burst.

His meditations were interrupted by the sound of approaching footsteps, and a singularly old man, with snowy beard and wrinkled face, hobbled slowly up to the bungalow and halted in front of him. It was Ghaiba, the *chowkeydar*, come to make his evening *salaam*.

"*Huzoor!*" (Your Honour.) The

words were quavered out in a salutation meant to be both respectful and comprehensive.

"Ah, Ghaiba, is that you? What is the news?" Jack asked the stereotyped question mechanically. It was phrased to keep up a little fiction that the ancient had stern duties to perform and important reports to render.

"The news of to-day," answered Ghaiba oracularly, "is as the news of yesterday."

"And will be the news of to-morrow," added Jack bitterly. "I know it by heart, Ghaiba. The sky is cloudless. The sun blazes down. There is no sign of rain. God sleeps. And the tea bushes die, and die, and die."

"True," answered Ghaiba phlegmatically. "I warned my lord when he began to cultivate the hill of *Kāla Devi* of the curse that lies upon it."

"And I told you, Ghaiba, then, and tell you again now, that you are a superstitious old man of the mountain, and at your really venerable age should be superior to black demons and rubbish of that sort."

"My age," remonstrated the old watchman with dignity, "is, as my lord knows, one hundred and twenty years."

"So you've told me one hundred and twenty times, and more," interjected Jack.

"Who, then, should know *Kāladevi Pahār* better than Ghaiba? Ghaiba who was born on it, and has lived on it while four dominions ruled in Hind. And yet," he went on inconsequently, dropping his voice to an uneasy whisper, "*that* thing still perplexes and troubles me."

"What thing? The well?"

"Even so. The Well of Oodmi Sing. Its waters continue to subside. It is a week since I first reported it to your honour. Since then each day the level of the water has fallen by a palm's breadth. And now I perceive at the foot of the rampart a space newly green, where the grass sprouts. The thirsty earth is stealing the water from my well."

"What wonder with such a drought as this, and the whole hillside splitting and gaping open? Is not the very river down in the valley dry?"

"The river has dried before many times. It is the sign of a famine year. But never yet the Well of Oodmi Sing. *Jenāb* (my lord), I fear this is a manifestation of the wrath of *Kāla Devi*. And if the well dries up——"

"——Yes?"

"I shall die," answered Ghaiba, with simple conviction. "It is the water of the well that sustains my life."

"There, there, old fellow—don't talk of dying," replied Jack kindly, laying his hand on Ghaiba's shoulder, "you are long past such a human weakness as that! Remember there are other wells to supply your wants."

"The *Huzoor* speaks truly. There are other wells. But none like the Well of Oodmi Sing. Its virtue is known to my lord. How it can turn all objects, aye, even fragile flowers, into stone. It is that virtue in the water that has prolonged Ghaiba's years far beyond the appointed number. If now this water dries up, who shall preserve a single flower beyond its little hour? And Ghaiba——?"

He stood nodding his head mournfully and inquiringly at Jack, his senile features clouded with a sadly troubled expression. "When Ghaiba is gone,

who will guard my lord's Fort and the Well of Oodmi Sing?"

"Look here, old chap," said Jack, clapping him gently on the back, "you are worrying yourself unnecessarily. All things will right themselves as soon as God awakes and the rain comes. And I've no doubt you'll go on guarding the Well of Oodmi Sing for another hundred years. What you want is a little encouragement in your somewhat protracted duty." He passed into the dining room, and returned in a moment with a bottle in his hand. "Here is something which will enable you to see life in a more cheerful light."

A dull sparkle of delight came into Ghaiba's eyes, as he hastily clutched the bottle and hid it in the capacious folds of his *choga*. "Ah, generous and compassionate cherisher of the needy," he exclaimed, his voice rising to a senile tremulo, "may wealth and honour descend on my lord, and sons upon sons be born unto him! Ghaiba is his slave, and will trouble him no more. Ghaiba returns to his post in the Fort. *Salaam, Jenāb, salaam,*" and muttering many benedictions the ancient shuffled back to his hut by the Well of Oodmi Sing.

The Fort Ghaiba alluded to stood perched on the crest of the hill which formed Jack's tea estate, and not more than fifty yards distant from the miniature plateau on which he had built his bungalow. It was known as *Miankōt*, or the Castle of the Noble, and had once been a Rajpoot chieftain's stronghold. But all that remained now was a skeleton look-out tower, a crumbling bastion, and an undermined rampart rising from a ruined mound of moss-grown stones. In what had been the courtyard of the Fort, and close to the rampart, stood a large tank, known in the native tongue as the Well of Oodmi Sing. It was a deep, dark, cavernous recess, arched over with masonry, and the waters within looked black, like the liquid in a vat. A curious circumstance connected with this well was its power of petrifying, and Jack had a collection of specimen flowers and other perishable objects, which had remained steeped in its waters until they turned into a brittle stony substance.

Jack was mightily fond and proud of

his old Fort, which—itsself picturesque beyond description—commanded matchless views of the Himalaya Mountains behind, and an undulating valley stretching away for miles and miles in front. Legend and tradition clustered thickly round the crumbling old walls that stood on the hill of *Kāla Devi*, or the Black Demon, and were piously preserved by Ghaiba, the self-constituted warden of the Fort in general, and the well in particular.

Ghaiba was a personality quite in keeping with the fort. In his shaggy woollen *choga*, with a goat's-hair girdle round his waist, and on his head the peculiar covering worn by Himalayan peasants, decorated with little tufts and pellets of coloured wool, he formed an appropriate and pleasing figure in the landscape. Moreover he was the essence of antiquity himself: almost as much a ruin as the fort.

If he was a little touched it was on the subject of the Well of Oodmi Sing, which he revered with a pagan awe. Night and morning he made sacrifices at its mouth, as he might at a shrine, strewing the precincts with rice and yellow flowers. He would allow no one to draw water from it except himself, who never did so without suspiciously peering into the brass vessel, and muttering incantations before he distributed its contents. He disliked people approaching his well, and if by chance he caught any one trying to peep into its black depths would violently push them aside with a threat that *Kāla Devi* would topple them in and turn them to stone if they dared to do so again.

Ghaiba came into Jack's keeping with the property. The old *chowkeydar* had lived in the Fort all his lifetime, and was as much a part and parcel of it as its foundation stones. At first he resented the intrusion of the light-hearted young Englishman into his ancient domain, and indeed used such strong expletives in illustration of his disapproval that Jack's Mohammedan servants requested their master's permission to eject the old Hindu *Badmash*. But so far from granting it, Jack took a fancy to the eccentric old fellow because of his independent spirit, and unadulterated anger, and half out of admiration, half out of

pity, confirmed him in his post of warden of the well, and wrote him down in the plantation muster-roll for a small monthly allowance. From that hour Ghaiba regarded Jack as his lawful liege lord, dubbed him *Mian Sahib*, and treated him with the same respect he had shown the proud old Rajpoot chieftains whom he served in his youth.

It was from Ghaiba that Jack heard the story of Mian Oodmi Sing, a semi-independent Rajpoot baron, and head of the Sonkla clan, who ruled over Miankōt for many years. He had been a doughty warrior in his day, and in Ghaiba's opinion clearly very little removed from a demi-god. But his most celebrated exploits, reduced to plain language, could hardly be distinguished from common filibustering. He was enormously rich, having accumulated great wealth of loot during a long and successful career, in which he impartially sacked every palace, town and bazaar within a hundred miles of Miankōt.

His end was violent. When the great Ghoorka invasion rolled over the submontane Himalayan States, Oodmi Sing was besieged in his Fort by the Nepal army, and reduced to the last straits by starvation. In this extremity he died as befitted his nobility, rallying forth at the head of his followers, and slaying a thousand of the foe before they were themselves exterminated. There was a horrible story sometimes whispered about a previous massacre of his women-folk, but Ghaiba, although he professed to have been present throughout the defence of Miankōt, would never speak of this. He loved rather to dwell on those brighter days of its earlier history, when it was the abiding-place of mail-clad warriors renowned in camp and field, and the scene of triumphant homecomings and barbaric festivities.

* * * *

For a full hour after Ghaiba left him, Jack Glover stalked his verandah, smoking his pipe and glouting over his troubles. He foresaw ruin impending, and there was no road for escape. From time to time he stopped, and cast his eyes towards the distant valley, where the smoke from hamlet and homestead was hanging heavily in the thick air,

and wondered sorrowfully how those poor devils of peasants managed to get through a famine year, gathering a sort of consolation from the consciousness of a common calamity. At last the sun set in a curtain of yellow dust, with which the air was laden, and Jack gave a sigh of relief. It was another day done. The short twilight came and went; and the indistinct stars began to glimmer dully. Then dinner was served, and he tried to force himself to eat; but it was too hot, too depressing in the house, and he returned to the verandah and resumed his restless stalk again.

Presently he found himself, hardly knowing how or why, strolling in the direction of the Fort, and turned off the road and up the path that led to it. A few steps carried him over the mouldering walls into the courtyard. Here the sound of a voice fell upon his ear. It was Ghaiba, the *chowkeydar*, chattering and gesticulating to himself as he crouched by the mouth of the Well of Oodmi Sing.

"Good," mused Jack, "the old chap has forgotten his troubles and is happy now. There is a marvellous virtue in a dram of coolie rum, and he has reaped the benefit of it. Well, Ghaiba," he said aloud, as he strolled towards him, "how goes your watch to-night?"

The old man started and turned a scared face towards Jack. It was some moments before he recognised his master. Then he slowly struggled to his feet, and coming close to him, lifted up his hands as one who commands silence. "Hark!" he whispered, "does not my lord hear them?"

"Hear what?"

"The Voices of the Well," and Ghaiba waved a trembling hand towards the cavernous recess.

Jack affected to listen. "There are no voices," he said pityingly. "It is the rustling of the peepul tree you hear. You are dreaming, Ghaiba."

The old man shook his head impatiently. "My lord may not hear the voices," he said, "but Ghaiba does. Even as he heard them on that dark day when Mian Oodmi Sing preserved the honour of his *zenana*—the day of the Great Sacrifice."

"What sacrifice do you speak of?" asked Jack. "Where did it happen?"

"It happened here," cried Ghaiba, striking the ground between them with his staff. "These stones ran red with blood."

"What happened here?"

For some moments the old man stood motionless, his eyes fixed on the ground, his attitude of one lost in deep thought. Then he heaved a deep sigh, and rousing himself, turned to Jack.

"Listen, then, *Jendab*," he said, "and thou shalt hear the story of the Well of Oodmi Sing.

"It was in the Black Year, when the Ghoorkas overran the land. None could resist them, for they came in numbers like the flying ants, when they swarm from the ground before the bursting of a thunderstorm. Kingdoms fell before them, and armies were swallowed up.

"They besieged Miankôt. For six desperate months Oodmi Sing held out. There was not so much grain left in the Fort as would fill the hollow of your honour's hand. The very stones of the walls were bare of their weeds and grass, that had been gathered to serve as food. That peepul tree was leafless.

"The Ghoorka dogs were encamped everywhere around and below. Thrice had they been driven back from the assault, and thereafter the cowards dared not storm the walls again. But from afar they mocked us, and laughed in our beards, and scattered grain before our starving eyes for the birds of the air to feast upon.

"'Tis well,' cried Oodmi Sing, and flung his favourite falcon. The blue *dhons* rose and fled in a cloud. But *Bijli* brought back one in her talons. 'Patrons of pigeons, and pigeon-hearted yourselves,' shouted Oodmi Sing from the battlement, 'beware of the falcons of the Fort.'

"Then the Ghoorka general had resort to treachery, and tying letters to the shafts of arrows shot them over the walls. In them were written promises of great rewards of money if the garrison would deliver up the Fort.

"Thereupon Oodmi Sing filled a great basket with gold mohurs, and bade a man carry it, and his warriors follow. And parading round the ramparts cast the

coin over in handfuls, so that the Ghoorka soldiery broke their ranks and fell to scrambling and fighting for it—aye, even to the officers in authority.

"'Beggars and base-born,' laughed Oodmi Sing, tugging at his beard, 'glut you with the gold you value more than honour.' Then to his warriors, 'Scatter! Scatter!' And at these words they each seized a great handful of gold, and hurled it at the rabble below. And the riot raged afresh. Seeing this, and his army all in disorder, shame fell upon the Ghoorka general, and he felt his face was blackened, and hid himself in his tent.

"Last of all he wrote a ribald missive, and sent it under a flag of truce, demanding the surrender of the Fort ere set of sun, under threat of shameful death by torture to the men, and for the women-folk nameless infamy.

They brought and laid the missive at Oodmi Sing's feet, and Poorun, the scribe, read it.

"Dark grew the face of the chief. 'Brothers, your answer?' he demanded, as he looked proudly round upon his clan.

"In the turn of a swallow's wing a hundred swords flashed in the air. 'This is our answer,' they cried, 'only give us leave to deliver it while yet we have strength.'

"Then Oodmi Sing knew they meant the Great Sacrifice—that fearful Rajpoot rite which dooms to death the women and children, and to self-immolation the men.

"So be it,' said the chief, and passed into the *zenana*, to make known to the women-folk the decision of the clan.

"He entered with stern set face and resolute step. When he returned his chin hung on his chest, and he swayed in his walk like a drunken man.

"He led his warriors to the Great Hall, where the feasts were held. And, at his summons, one came bearing in his hand the bowl of opium that was



"IT WAS THERE I CROUCHED"

to nerve them for the deed they had to do. In silence they drank it, and the subtle fire mounted into their brains, and their eyes grew strange and wild. Then they robed themselves in yellow garments, the fatal colour of accepted doom, and bared their heads and waited."

Ghaiba paused, and passed his hand thrice across his face with a shudder.

"It was there I crouched," he went on, with a stern effort, pointing to an embrasure in the rampart, visible now by the light of the moon just topping the mountains. "I was but a child, forgotten and unheeded. And as I hid and peeped, I saw the door of the *zenana* open, and forth there issued the women and children of the clan. At their head, calm and stately, walked the wife of Oodmi Sing. Slowly they circled round the courtyard, singing the song of sacrifice."

With the action of a man reverently making way, Ghaiba retreated a few steps, waving his staff feebly to indicate the spot.

"Here they gathered in a group," again he struck the ground, "and stood, unveiled, so that all men might see their faces. *Jenáb! Jenáb!* it was a sight to soften the heart of Siva the Destroyer. Calm and beautiful, and innocent and helpless, they stood. Arrayed in silken garments, gay with brightest colours; their arms and bosoms glittering with gems and gold; their faces turned to the sun. It was as if a cluster of lovely flowers had suddenly blossomed out of these stones.

"The song of sacrifice ceased for a moment, and a woman's voice rang out clear and unshaken:

"The wife of Oodmi Sing awaits her lord."

Once more Ghaiba stopped. He was trembling violently. He fell back a few paces, and leaned against the masonry of the well.

"And then?" whispered Jack, to rouse him.

"There came the clank of steel, and the rush of many feet. A yellow multitude surged out. Madness was in their eyes. They were tigers, not men.

"As the icy snow wind, rushing down from the mountains, sweeps over the

meadows and lays them low, so swooped Oodmi Sing and his Sonklas upon that cluster of flowers. His was the arm to strike the signal blow. But it was with averted face. *Kála Devi* guided his sword against the bosom of his wife, bared to receive it. And the blood spurted out and drenched Oodmi Sing.

"At the sight of it there broke out hoarse inhuman howls and frenzied cries, and a hurricane of descending blows, followed by the hideous thud of stricken flesh. It was blood—blood—blood everywhere. Blood and butchery. But from the women never a shriek. Only the song of sacrifice, fading away, until it was stifled in sobs and gasps.

"*Hai! Hai!* The deed was done. There was no resistance," and Oodmi Sing leaned heavily against the well—"aye, even here where I am leaning now," and pointed at it with his finger.

"Dripping with the blood of their slaughtered wives and children, his warriors gathered up the corpses and cast them in."

Slowly Ghaiba rose, and passing round to the mouth of the well, pointed into its cavernous depths.

"There they lie," he moaned, "there they lie," and rocked his body to and fro.

Then with a look of awful apprehension he clutched Jack by the arm, and peering anxiously into his face, whispered:

"And now the well is drying up. My lord knows the virtue of its waters?"

"The virtue of its waters?" echoed Jack, in a startled voice.

"Aye. The virtue of its waters. My lord has seen how tender flowers and leaves, that a babe might crush in its fingers, harden into stone in the Well of Oodmi Sing. The flowers of the Sonkla clan lie beneath these waters. Can my lord not reason?"

"Impossible," cried Jack incredulously, "impossible."

"To *Kála Devi* all things are possible," said Ghaiba impressively, as he shook his head and raised his hands aloft.

Then he suddenly and utterly broke down, as if the strain of excitement were too great to endure longer. His hands dropped to his side in a helpless despair, and he sank feebly upon the ground,

moaning: "There is trouble here; there is trouble here!" And so resumed the crouching position in which Jack had first found him.

Jack waited patiently a few minutes, and tried to arouse him. But the old man turned on him with vacant eyes and answered nothing. He only moaned, and rocked himself, and looked into the well.

Nothing would induce him to speak again. And, in the end, Jack was obliged to leave him, still moaning—still looking into the well.

"Poor old chap!" he muttered to himself as he returned to his bungalow, "he is madder than ever to-night." And, flinging himself into a capacious cane arm-chair in the verandah, he set to work recalling all that Ghaiba had told him, and wondering how the loquacious old man had kept this story to himself so long. And in doing so it came to pass that presently he fell asleep.

* * * *

When he awoke it was long past midnight, for the waning moon had mounted high. He had been aroused so instantly and thoroughly, that he made sure one of his servants had done it, until a glance to left and right showed him he was alone. And yet he could have sworn some one shook him. He arose and looked through the house, only to find it empty. Trivial and perfectly natural as the discovery was, it created in his mind a sensation of uneasiness he could not account for. He felt absolutely certain he had been awakened by some one shaking him.

Perplexed and restless, he strolled out into the open space in front, and began pacing up and down. A deathlike stillness filled the sweltering air, and even the insects of the night were dumb. The earthy smell of dust reeked in the atmosphere, sour as a London fog. The stones and rocks scattered about exhaled the heat they had absorbed during the day. Under his tread the grass cracked and snapped crisply. A sense of unrest and apprehension, which he could not explain, began to oppress Jack painfully.

"Hullo! What's that?" he suddenly ejaculated, as he found himself involuntarily lurching forward. "Who

pushed me? Hang it—there I go again! There's something queer about this. I shall be hearing the Voices of the Well next, and seeing the ghosts of old Oodmi Sing's women-folk."

Instinctively he glanced towards the Fort, with a look of half-superstitious expectation on his face. Even as he did so, there came from the earth beneath him a low rumbling sound, and the ground began to tremble and oscillate violently. The next instant his eyes were riveted in a paralysis of astonishment on the look-out tower. It was swaying to and fro like the masts of a ship at anchor. Then, with a sudden lurch, it toppled and fell. Simultaneously there came a crash behind him, and he leaped round just in time to see his bungalow collapsing like a house of cards.

"My God! what an earthquake!" he gasped, spellbound in helpless horror. His teeth chattered, his brow was drenched with cold perspiration, a vertigo of giddiness seized him, and he felt he had lost all power of voluntary movement. For a full minute he stood, swaying to and fro on the oscillating ground, until the wave gradually passed by.

When his self-control returned, he cautiously approached the wreck of his bungalow, and stood gazing at it in a witless way. Then he shouted for his servants, but none answered him. Rushing to the back, where their huts stood, he found all levelled to the ground. Again he called, but without avail. In a panic of desperation he began to quarry away at the ruins, only to convince himself that instantaneous death had overwhelmed them.

The despair of loneliness shook him. Was he the only person left alive on *Kaladevi*? He remembered Ghaiba, and dashed towards the Fort. As he neared it, he caught the faint sound of trickling water. Picking his way over the newly-littered ground, he mounted the foundations of the wall, and stood peering into the gloom. In front of him, where formerly the courtyard stretched, a huge black chasm gaped. The whole of the rampart had fallen away, carrying with it the bastion and Ghaiba's hut, and half of the Well of

Oodmi Sing, from which the water was still draining away through the débris.

"Ghaiba!" he called out hoarsely, "Ghaiba, are you alive?"

In the silence that followed, he recognised the silence of the tomb. Ghaiba, the *chowkeydar*, was dead and buried beneath the ruins of the well he had guarded so long and faithfully.

* * * *

Morning came at last, and revealed the extent and cause of the catastrophe. The water oozing from the bottom of the well had saturated the foundations of the undermined rampart, and in the convulsion of the earthquake the moist, heavy mass had started away from the dry surroundings and toppled over, carrying with it more than half the well.

A portion of the courtyard still remained, and making his way to its edge, Jack looked at the chaos of earth and stone below, seeking for some sign of Ghaiba's fate.

Presently, as his keen gaze scrutinised the surface, he became aware of a certain repetition of shape in the grey-coloured stones. The peculiarity caught and arrested his attention with a curious insistence. Then it began to suggest. He stared and stared, and rubbed his eyes, and stared again. Was it fancy—this which he saw, or thought he saw?

But the grey shapes remained, distinct and ever suggestive—shapes that bore a weird resemblance to human bodies.

As he looked there flashed across Jack's memory Ghaiba's last words, and the gruesome suggestion which Jack had dismissed as the delusion of a crazy brain. But it was no delusion, for he realised now these fantastic shapes below were petrified human bodies. They lay in huddled confusion, just as they had been swept down by the first rush of escaping water. Ghastly relics, imperishably fixed in the rigid attitudes of violent death.

A morbid curiosity prompted him to examine them more closely. Lowering himself on to the débris, he crept towards the spot where the remains lay thickest. In his passage the pressure of his tread moved an object on which he had stepped, and a lean stiff arm was

levered up, and struck his knee. He sprang back with a shudder, as though he had trodden on a snake.

The stony arm fell back, and in doing so something adhering to it glistened—something that was yellow, and shone like gold.

It caught Jack's eye. For a few moments he held back, hesitating what to do. Then his curiosity asserted itself, and stooping down he touched the arm with an inquisitive finger. It was rough, cold, hard—a petrified bone, encrusted with a scaly substance. He jerked it over, and as he did so, the yellow gleam came to view again.

And then he saw that it glinted from a bangle cemented to the wrist. The metal was dull and tarnished, except at one spot, where it had been scraped bright by recent friction. He tried to detach it, but it was firmly fixed. Then he exerted a little force. Whereupon the arm snapped in two at the wrist, the bangle falling to the ground, and the skeleton hand remaining in his. With a shudder he dropped it, as he would an unclean thing.

It was horrible. But, notwithstanding, he was fascinated into examining the stony surroundings, to which the arm belonged. There was but little difficulty in making them out. The small round skull, the slender neck, the spreading ribs, the lean lower limbs, contorted in the agonies of death—ghastly but undeniable remnants of a woman's frame.

A woman once, but now a mere shape in stone, with less suggestion of humanity than a mummy or skeleton. He was emboldened to stir the thing with his foot. It rolled over, and a portion of the scale that encrusted it fell away in little flaky scabs, revealing the anatomy more distinctly. He gathered courage, and picked up the hand again. It was strangely light to the feel, and when he tapped it with his knuckles, gave back a hard sound. Then he rubbed off a piece of the flaky substance between the fingers, and in doing so disclosed three rings encircling them.

He gave a whistle of surprise, and in an instant remembered how Ghaiba had mentioned that Oodmi Sing's women-

folk were adorned and decorated in silks and jewellery when they were massacred. Here was food for thought. If it was true, what treasures might there not be in this heap of petrified bodies?

They lay ready to his hand, but he hesitated. Something whispered to him it was rifling the dead. He

would no one else? And after all was said and done, what harm was there in it? Had not the dead been despoiled before in the name of scientific antiquarian research? Were not the museums of the civilised world filled with the excavated treasures of Babylon, Nineveh, Pompeii? Did any stigma of



HE TOOK HIS KNIFE AND GAVE THE BRITTLE FINGERS
A RAP WITH ITS BUTT

pondered for a little, and was forced to admit it in theory. But the temptation was great, and presently he began to argue as to practice. And first, if gold was here for the gathering, what good was it to these stony fragments of humanity? If he did not despoil them,

body-snatching attach to the savants who sacked the Pyramids? Would he, as a sensible man, hesitate for a moment if this corpse in front of him were a thousand years old, instead of one whose tragic story he had heard from living lips but yesterday?

Then came the most potent argument of all—the rings on the hand he held in his. He took out his knife, and gave the brittle fingers a rap with its butt. They broke, and he very philosophically drew off the rings, one of which he found, on examination, was set with a stone. Clearing away the scale with his thumb-nail, he made out the stone to be a turquoise. Then he picked up the bangle, and opening his knife, began to scrape it clean. It was heavy, massive, and of purest gold. "Worth a tenner at least," commented Jack, weighing it in his hand.

That decided him. Slipping the ornaments into his pocket, he strode down to the spot where the bulk of bodies lay. A few keen glances, a little skilful handling, and he was convinced that on every shrunken arm and ghastly neck objects were crusted which could only be ornaments.

No qualm of conscience now. The lust of treasure-seeking overcame him. With a thrill of excitement, he set to work to examine the remains that lay piled at his feet. Many of the bodies were mutilated—an arm here, a leg there, a head without its trunk. Others had suffered less in their rude ejection from their sepulchre. But all yielded tribute. Every variety of ornament that Eastern womankind have for centuries delighted in were here. Necklaces, bangles, bracelets, anklets, rings of all sorts, for the fingers, the toes, the ears, the nose (many set with rough,

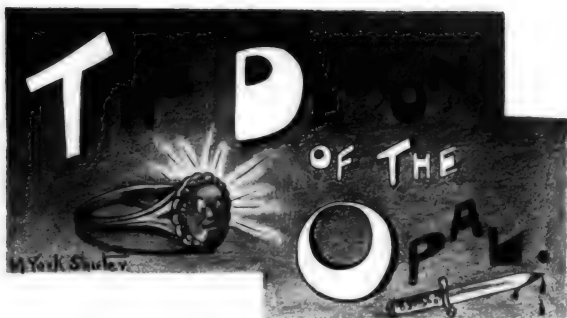
unpolished gems), ornaments for the hair, the bosom, and the waist.

Hour after hour Jack delved and quarried with feverish fingers amongst the heap of fossil remains, flinging aside those from which he had gathered their treasures, and plunging forward in search of fresh ones. His pockets were soon filled, and taking off his coat, he spread it on a level spot, and tossed the various trinkets on to it, until a goodly heap grew up under his eye. And reviewing it Jack thought of Oodmi Sing, and how he had collected these jewels and treasures from the harem of Moghul and the zenana of Sikh, in the doughty days when he held Rajahs to ransom, and cities under requisition.

* * * *

The simple-minded hill-folk who still pasture their flocks about *Kaladevi Pahār* tell the story of a young Englishman who settled there for a year in defiance of the warning of Ghaiba, the *chowkeydar*. But *Kāla Devi*, outraged by the impious invasion of his sanctuary, burnt up the sahib's tea-bushes with flames of fire, created an earthquake that shattered his bungalow to the ground, and miraculously transported Ghaiba to the seventy-seventh Heaven. Whereupon the Englishman departed, and was no more seen. And from that time forward never was any found bold enough to visit the spot which the Black Demon had so particularly marked as his own.





WRITTEN BY W. B. WALLACE, B.A.

ILLUSTRATED BY M. YORK SHUTER

I. THE BEGUM OF BHOPAL.



HE slaves had set down her palanquin beneath the grateful shade of the giant banyan and departed. The presence of the princess and her maidens had for the nonce converted the garden into a zenana, not to be polluted by the step of man, and the bearers had joined the royal guards, who kept watch just without its precincts.

The languorous heat of the afternoon had rapidly induced slumber, and the distant laughter of her attendants, who were disporting themselves in the refreshing waters of the great tank, and pelting each other emulously with nenuphars and roses, and even the sacred lotus, did not disturb the Begum of Bhopal.

Her rest was tranquil and happy. Why, indeed, should it be otherwise? Was she not young and beautiful, wealthy and powerful, and a queen? Nay, on the present occasion, it was,

perhaps, even more blissful than its wont. Could you have peeped between the silken hangings of her palanquin, you would have seen a faint smile upon her face, and a slight roseate flush just tinging the pale olive of her rounded cheek.

She was dreaming. Of whom or what? Perchance of the gallant and handsome Mahratta warrior, Mohammed Khan, the trusted captain of her guard.

As she slept, her right arm, which had slipped from its cushion, hung gracefully down from the carved ivory edge of her couch, and upon her finger scintillated the vivid fiery rays of a magnificent opal.

And so the peaceful moments glided on. Although she was a princess, they were perhaps the happiest of her life.

Silvery ripples of girlish laughter from the bath, a faint breath of wind sighing through the banyan grove—these were the only sounds audible.

Stay, there was now assuredly a slight but constant rustle somewhere other than that of the breeze in the fan-like leaves.

Yes, between the massive roots and

the spreading shadows of the banyan a man was crawling, wriggling like a snake, nearer and ever nearer to the palanquin and its slumbering occupant.

The dress of the intruder was mean, his form slight, though lithe and sinewy, but there was the light of a terrible and demoniac hate in his yellow feline eyes, and held between his teeth there gleamed a formidable creese.

Oriental are always capricious, often cruel, and seldom just. Only the day before, the Begum had ordered the bastinado to be administered to her Malay

grove would afford him an opportunity of wreaking his revenge and probably effecting his escape as well.

It had been an easy matter for the Malay to conceal himself in the garden, and now he was within measurable distance of the goal he coveted.

With infinite caution, and inch by inch, he raised himself and peered around. There was nobody in sight, but for all that he knew that not an instant was to be lost. The Begum might wake, or her maidens might return. There would be a struggle and cries for



"SLOWLY, STEALTHILY, NOISELESSLY, HE DREW ASIDE THE CURTAINS"

servant Ibrahim for a trifling fault. Smarting under the indignity, which he felt far more than the physical torture, the man had registered an internal vow of vengeance. At first he had determined to run *amok*, to draw his creese, rush upon the guards, and slay and be slain. Cooler reflection, however, suggested that it would be something worse than mere folly to sacrifice his own life and the lives of other innocent persons while the author of his disgrace remained unpunished. And then it had suddenly flashed across his mind that the customary siesta of the princess in the comparative solitude of the banyan-

help, which would be speedily forthcoming.

Slowly, stealthily, noiselessly, he drew aside the curtains of the palanquin, gloated for a moment on his prey, and then with one swift, sure blow, into which he put all his strength, clove the heart beating so tranquilly beneath the fine transparent gauze vest.

The usual savage passion for mutilation, and perhaps a desire for the glittering jewel, gave him brief pause while he severed the small, drooping hand at the wrist and thrust the bleeding member into a bag which he carried suspended from his waist.

Successfully eluding the vigilance of the guards, he then made his way into the tangled depths of the adjoining Terai. Then he felt himself secure. A grim smile of satisfaction crossed his visage. Had he not done wisely and well? He had not run *amok*, according to the absurd fashion of his race; he had effectually avenged himself without loss of life or limb.

And yet death was tracking him; it was his fate, for all his precautions, to slay and be slain.

As he passed through the jungle a hungry tiger that had been crouching in ambush, watching for a victim, leaped upon him, pinned him to the ground, and bore away the lacerated body in triumph to his lair.

Next day some peasants found the bag, which had become detached in the fatal struggle, lying on the path.

A century later, and a few years after the suppression of the Indian Mutiny, the opal ring—which in the interim had often changed owners—became the property of Lieutenant Carruthers, of the 5th Gurkhas.

II.

IN CLUBLAND.

On one of those frightful nights of storm and tempest, sleet and slush, and general unpleasantness, which luckless Londoners had to endure last winter—1898-99—three men, Vavasour, Fairfax, and Brandon, were enjoying their cigars, and a rather discursive chat in the luxurious smoking-room of the *Hermæum*, which presented a sufficiently striking contrast to the state of affairs outside.

Somehow or other the conversation turned upon opals, of all things in the world. It was Arthur Fairfax who gave the ball its first impetus.

"By-the-bye, I saw you at the Savoy last night, Vavasour," he said. "Did you notice how very charming Lady Harringay, that smartest of smart women, was looking? She seemed to set superstition at defiance, for she was wearing a row of superb opals round her throat."

"I am afraid you are rather behind the times, my dear Arthur," cut in Brandon, maliciously. "Don't you know

that opals, in obedience to the sovereign fiat of Fashion, the Queen of the World, have emerged from their temporary retirement, and are now all the rage with our Society dames?"

Fairfax looked abashed. There is nothing upsets a man so much as being thought not quite up to date, and Vavasour hastened to take up the parable, whether anxious to maintain his own reputation as the most interminable talker in the club, or to relieve the evident embarrassment of his friend.

"I confess," he began, "that I have always regarded these stones, with the fiery demon at their heart, as the Arabs will tell you, as particularly uncanny ever since, as a boy, I devoured a certain weird story about them, introduced by Sir Walter Scott in his *Anne of Geierstein*."

"Do tell, Vavasour," interposed Brandon, with a laughable assumption of the nasal Transatlantic twang.

But Vavasour, much as he liked the sound of his own voice, was not to be drawn thus.

"No, thank you," he replied with dignity. "I perceive your education has been scandalously neglected, and as I have neither time nor inclination to supply its deficiencies, I must refer you to the romance in question."

Brandon had choked off his adversary, and promptly availed himself of the opportunity thus afforded for airing his own views. It is perhaps necessary to explain that he was the scientific man *par excellence* of the club, and that anthropology was his special hobby.

"It is extremely difficult," he said, "to account for the strange circumstance that opals and peacocks' feathers are both universally considered unlucky. The thing is absurd on the face of it, but like many another absurdity it is a fact to be reckoned with. And the craze, moreover, is no new-fangled one; it is of hoary, nay, immemorial antiquity. Now I have only a theory to offer, but such as it is you are welcome to it.

"When the æsthetic sense first dawned in the benighted minds of our remote and respectable ancestors, the cave-dwellers, I fancy they went in as recklessly for personal adornment as the

women nowadays do for new hats. Feathers and stones are amongst the earliest possessions of savages, and the gaudiest feathers and handsomest stones would naturally find the greatest favour in the eyes of our unsophisticated forefathers. Now can you imagine that any stone would be more popular than the milky opal, with fire, man's earliest friend—not a fiend, as Vavasour suggests—dwelling enshrined in its heart? And what plumage is more gloriously iridescent than that of the peacock, more calculated to appeal to the Troglodyte's love of colour? The feathers and the gems, then, would be universally prized. So far so good; but then you must next remember that the tenure of property in those primitive days was, for obvious reasons, rather precarious. The possessor of these coveted treasures would only hold them—as the priest of Nemi did his office—until a stronger man than he came along, slew him, and despoiled him of his goods. And now you see the drift of my argument. In course of time these gauds came to be thought unlucky, for their owners almost invariably came to grief in the long run."

"A very ingenious theory, indeed," remarked a grave voice at the speaker's elbow.

He started, turned round, and to his surprise beheld Colonel Carruthers, who had joined the little group unobserved.

The Colonel was an old Anglo-Indian, of gentlemanly aspect, soldierly bearing, and unobtrusive, nay, almost taciturn manners. He was always faultlessly attired and perfectly groomed, but his thoughtful face wore the impress of some deep and abiding sorrow, and his only apparent relaxation was a quiet game of chess, at which scientific pastime he was an adept.

"Gentlemen," proceeded Colonel Carruthers, while his hearers were utterly astounded at his unwonted loquacity, "I have listened with deep interest to your conversation. I need hardly say that I should not have played eavesdropper had it been of a private nature. Will you now permit me to state that I know from personal experience, or rather"—instantly correcting himself—"from the experience of a friend, that in this case the voice of superstition, for once at least, is the voice of truth, and that opals *are* unlucky—bring misfortune to their owners, even in our present advanced stage of civilisation. I have no theory; I do not attempt to account for the thing; I merely mention it as a fact."



"HE STARTED, TURNED ROUND, AND TO HIS SURPRISE BEHELD COLONEL CARRUTHERS"

He paused, but Brandon begged him to proceed.

"It all happened years ago," said the Colonel, with a deep sigh. "My friend, a young officer, whom I will call Lieutenant Vintram, was home from India on sick leave. It was his fortune, or rather fate, to meet one night at a ball a beautiful girl, to whom his life became thenceforth devoted. Lucy Okeden was the daughter of a wealthy London alderman, who had purchased a magnificent place down in Cheshire, and her parents cherished vast ambitions on their only child's behalf. It was scarcely likely that they would encourage the pretensions of a young subaltern who had nothing but his pay and his expectations. Nor did they.

"One of you gentlemen mentioned Sir Walter Scott a few moments ago. Lucy Okeden resembled only too closely in her character, beauty, position, and untimely end, her hapless namesake, Lucy Ashton, the Bride of Lammermoor. Fair and simple, pure and innocent, fragile and yielding as the daisy of Burns' pathetic poem, she was fated to become the victim of the insane ambition of others, and to be crushed beneath a merciless ploughshare—the ploughshare of destiny.

"Lucy Okeden, it is true, gave her heart unreservedly to the young officer, her first and her only love, but she was as wax in the hands of her vulgar and scheming parents, who barely tolerated Vintram. But the lovers lived only in the present, and saw not or recked not of the ominous clouds fast gathering on the horizon.

"In the midst of a joyous summer, wherein the enamoured pair frequently met at fêtes and pic-nics, and in the houses of mutual friends, Lieutenant Vintram received a letter summoning him to the bedside of his father, who lay dangerously ill, dying, it was thought, in London. In their parting interview by the shores of a romantic lake in the alderman's extensive park, he gave his love, as a seal of their engagement, a magnificent opal ring, which he had purchased in India, and which—so the grim tradition went—had been taken a hundred years before from the dis-severed hand of a beautiful Begum of

Bhopal, who had been assassinated and mutilated by her Malay servant. And then he tore himself away from her embrace. Strange are the ways of fate! Little did he dream that he would never, never behold Lucy more.

"His father's illness was long and tedious. He was consequently a fixture in London; but he wrote frequently to Cheselden Manor. His letters remained unanswered. This amazed him; for a kind of informal sanction of their engagement had been wrung from Lucy's parents shortly before his departure. There came, however, one fatal morning, when he received a packet. It contained the opal ring and these words: 'Farewell for ever. My parents have withdrawn their consent to our union. My heart is broken, but I must obey them.—LUCY.'

"That very day he heard at his club that a marriage had been arranged, and was shortly about to take place, between Miss Okeden and the Earl of Altrincham. The latter was known to him by repute as a venerable and gouty peer, whose antecedents were not quite as satisfactory as his rent-roll. He hurried home in a state of frenzy, and lost not a moment in sending back the ring without comment to her whom he had so adored, but whom he now cursed in his heart as false and fickle. He at least would not be a party to her act of betrayal.

"But the next dawn brought sorrow and repentance in its train. He hurried down to Cheshire, and that evening reached the village, in whose outskirts Cheselden Manor stands. He entered the park and sought the border of the lake, the spot where they had parted. He scarcely knew why he did so. Perhaps he had some vague idea that he might meet Lucy there. He sat down on a rustic bench where they had often lingered on the sweet summer evenings. It was fine autumnal weather now, but for him all the beauty of nature had departed. He looked towards the house, and was surprised to note that, with the exception of a twinkling taper in one or two of the windows, all was enveloped in darkness.

"A man came up. It was Bill Adams, one of the keepers. On recognising

Lieutenant Vintram in the moonlight, he touched his hat respectfully, and paused for a moment.

"'No doubt you have heard the sad news, sir,' he said, with a touch of genuine feeling in his rough voice. 'No? Poor Miss Lucy is dead. You see, sir, she was never strong, and she did not take kindly, so it was thought, to the match with Lord Altrincham. Well, this morning she received a parcel. The lady's maid says that when she saw the writing her poor hand trembled so that she could scarcely open the packet. When she did so at last, an opal ring dropped out. Miss Lucy, pale as death, took it up, kissed it, and placed it on the table beside her. The very next

moment she put her hand to her heart and fell to the ground fainting, as Mary thought, but when she raised her she was dead.'"

The Colonel's voice had long been faltering, and his story ended in something suspiciously like a sob. He turned aside his head and hastened away, acknowledging the thanks of his auditors with a silent bow.

* * * * *

"The friend was all a myth," said Brandon to Vavasour, as they parted that night beneath the lamp at the entrance to the chambers of the latter. "Colonel Carruthers has told us the story of his own life."





WRITTEN BY H. F. CAMPBELL ILLUSTRATED BY SPENCER BLYTH

"**M**AY I describe you as an intellectual sensualist, Smith?" said the one man who represented the minority in the argument; proceeding, "No offence, you know."

"Come, come, Dundas, I think that's rather strong, I must say—even if you are getting the worst of the argument," fussily puffed the little city capitalist, who owned the well-spread supper table at which the party were seated.

"But, my dear Cohen, I like any compliments I'm paid not to be too obvious," objected Smith.

"Dundas wraps his up with a subtlety that appeals very strongly to my sense of vanity."

"Also," continued Dundas, "I deny I'm getting the worst of the argument. You apply the cloture periodically, and all vote me down, but that is mere brute force, like the crime you're all supporting."

"Oh, settle it between yourselves, I'm sorry I spoke," said Cohen; "but it's difficult not to speak when Dundas, in his rabid defence of vegetarianism, calls eating meat a crime."

Dundas looked round the table with his piercing black eyes, but read no support in any one's face. Then he

answered, "Of course it's a crime, and none the less so that it's the general law of this world that we use our intellects to pervert. Self-preservation dictates that we should destroy many animals that are harmful to us; but we create life to take it away again by artificially breeding animals for the sole purpose of destroying them afterwards."

"How about our carnivorous teeth?" said Smith, laconically.

"How about any objectionable atavistic trait, moral or bodily?" replied Dundas. "Self-restraint, of course, would rid us of it by evolution. Also, may I point out that our canine teeth were primarily intended for battle, when we were giant apes."

"Well, it's easy to prophesy that your branch of the Dundas family will eventually become giant rabbits on the food that you've mapped out for them. You call it evolution; I call it devolution. Animals were given us to eat, and I shall eat them. Moreover, I don't intend to go in for a double stomach to please anybody. Meals take up enough of my time as it is, without having all the work to do over again."

"Who gave us animals to eat? I suppose you'd say God did, if you believed in Him."

"But wait a minute," interrupted

Smith; "I *do* believe in Him. But don't quote me the Old Testament. I don't believe in that ill-tempered old Arab sheikh Jahvey. I said *God*; don't misunderstand me. Although I am a meat-eater, I don't crave for the blood of innocent goats to satisfy my fits of spleen. With me it is merely appetite."

"Well, that simplifies my argument. The higher conception you have of the Deity the better. What do you suppose we are given intellects for, but to correct the empire of cruelty that is rampant in this world?—instead of which many of us seem to think the intellect is made to pander to the basest instincts of the senses. We have no right to any pleasure that is derived from a fellow-creature's pain."

"But there's no pain to speak of! Death is instantaneous."

"No pain! Do you know what a hell a cattle ship is on the Atlantic, when the beasts are rolled about goring each other, slipping, falling, breaking their limbs—the dying with the dead? Happy are the dead. They, at least, are spared the final butchery."

"But *that* is over immediately."

"Yes, if the butcher makes a good shot with the pole-axe; but you forget the mental agony before that, in the shambles."

"Nonsense! emotional nonsense!" ejaculates Smith, almost rudely.

"Is it? *Will* you try?"

"What are you driving at?"

"Did you ever hear of the man who was hypnotised, and had his mind transferred into that of a criminal who was about to be guillotined. No? Well, I have some little skill in hypnotism, as you know. I will transfer your mind to that of a certain animal I know of. I wanted to try the experiment, and as, at last, I've found a man who *knows* there is no pain, it is an opportunity not to be lost. Come now, I challenge you. Accept, or eat your words. I appeal to you all. Is it fair?"

"Yes, certainly," they all chorussed, much interested—though, had they been the chief person concerned, they would not have seen matters in quite the same light.

Smith rather recoiled.

"Well," he began, haltingly, "I think it rather a morbid experiment."

"Oh, then, you retract what you said?"

"Most emphatically not. I adhere to it. There is no pain."

"You'd better let me try the experiment then. I don't know that I shall succeed. *Don't* be afraid."

"Yes, do—most interesting—quite an idea," chorussed the other men.

"I'm *not* afraid—only rather disgusted," replied Smith. All the same he would have liked to get out of it, but was carried away by the situation, and reluctantly agreed at last. It is doubtful whether he would have done so, if he had not privately believed Dundas would fail in the attempt.

"That's right," said Dundas rather unkindly, "I hope you are right—for your sake. However, don't be alarmed, you'll come back after your death, I'll see to that. You will find it quite an adventure. Sure you wouldn't like the trip across the Atlantic as well?"

Smith shook his head, and forced a laugh.

"Very well, then. I'll come round to your rooms to-morrow morning. You are to be slaughtered in the afternoon. Come round about five, you fellows. He will just about be coming out of it then. But I'd better have a witness from the beginning—Cohen, can you come?"

"Yes," said Cohen, "I'd throw up anything to see it."

"All right. Good-night, then. Take plenty of rest to-night, Smith. It is not every day one has the opportunity of being pole-axed; so you'd better come fresh to it."

Next day, Smith would have given a good deal to go back on his word; but his pride forbade this, and he still buoyed himself up with the conviction that Dundas would utterly fail.

"Now," said Dundas, when he had arrived with Cohen, "are you ready? You are. Very well, I'll just explain a little to you, before I start. You will lose your personality and your mind. You will not be able to think more than

the ox, or feel more than the ox. To all intents and purposes, you will be the ox. I give you one last chance; do you take back everything you said last night?"

"No," replied Smith, firmly.

"Then we'll start." He commenced mesmeric passes, and in a short time succeeded. He rarely failed; his hypnotic power was not given to more than one man in a generation. It was a force.

"What does he mean?" asked Cohen.

"He is being driven with other creatures—to the shambles. Let us hope a painless death awaits him," answered Dundas grimly.

Smith had recovered consciousness— if losing one's identity and having it transferred bodily into some one else's



"I—AM—IN—A—COUNTRY—ROAD—WALKING—WALKING—WITH—OTHERS"

Ascertaining first that Smith was entirely under the influence, by pulling back the eyelids, he proceeded to suggest his wishes with all his strength.

"Where are you? Answer!" he asked in a few minutes.

Presently Smith's voice came, as if from an immense distance, with a sleepy touch in it. "I—am—on—a—country—road—walking—walking—with—others." He stopped.

"That will do," said Dundas.

can be so termed. The first conscious feeling he had was that of a marvellous sense of smell. It entirely dominated his other senses. True, he could see fairly well, but it was only an adjunct; it was not his chief sense. Everything he saw looked rather dream-like. He felt hungry, and though he smelt hay all round him, and sometimes paused to see where it was, some one behind drove him with blows. The hard road hurt his feet. Presently another animal

came down the road, in an opposite direction, dragging something behind it which frightened him. It rotated, and had a grating noise. His comrades were frightened, too, and they all turned to flee, but the man behind beat them, and drove them on. The thing did not hurt them, after all, but passed on. Then he came to some food beside the road and stopped to eat, but he only got a mouthful—he was driven on. Not long afterwards they came to a large village, and though there were several alarming things he could not understand, they had safely got half-way through it when the man behind ceased driving them on. He did not like the look of the house they had stopped at. Skinned dead bodies, hacked in pieces, hung on hooks outside. The man opened two large folding doors, and began driving them in. Faugh! how the place reeked of fresh-shed blood! They all recoiled.

More men came, and they were fiercely beaten from behind. They ran hither and thither in their anguish; they would go anywhere rather than into this bloody trap. Their agony was none the less for being dumb. At last the others lost their heads, and blundered into the very place they would avoid, but he made a desperate dash, not for liberty, but life—only dear life. The murderers and their abettors scattered like chaff from before him. He was irresistible. Dashing madly up a side road, the hue and cry gradually died away behind. He had come to a little hill, and began cropping the sweet grass, though he still trembled with his late experiences. But he was not to be left in peace for long; the murderers came running round a corner, and tried to get round him—he could smell the blood on their clothes. He made another desperate dash up the hill, breaking through a hedge at the top into a field, where he stood at bay, with distended eyes and dilated nostrils. He was safe at last, he hoped. He began pretending to eat, but was uneasy, lifting his head often, to watch the heads of the butchers, who were posted round the field. Presently the gate was opened, and he saw a small herd of cows. He pricked up his ears, and

walked towards them; the solitude he was so unused to, surrounded by enemies, had tortured him. Soon he joined the herd, and walked downhill with them. Now, surely, the bitterness of death was overpassed.

They were doubtless going to some pleasant lush-meadow, where all would be restful peace, as before. Down the road they went, into the village again, past the dreadful spot—no—suddenly there was a rush from behind, blows rained on him—he tried to turn, was headed back, turned again, stumbled—more fierce blows—a mist floated before his eyes—he ran forward a few paces to escape from his persecutors—there was a clang as the heavy gate swung behind, and he was trapped. His doom had overtaken him; he knew further struggles were useless, and he went into a little stable shed without further resistance; but his mind suffered a dumb agony. He sniffed in the dreadful smell of death at every breath.

There was a pause, but the men were not idle. He could see nothing; but, presently, there was a stamping and scuffling outside. Then he heard a rush into the slaughter-house next door, from which only a thin board divided him. It was one of his comrades of the morning. Presently there was a dull thud, and something heavy fell. A charnel-house smell soon crept through the chinks.

In about half-an-hour's time, or perhaps more, the upper half of the door was thrown open, and a man leant over, and passed a noose over his horns, then the lower half opened, the man retired, and he walked out, suspicious as to what would happen next.

Only one man's head was visible, right away on the opposite side of the yard. There were two doors open, the one from which he had just come out, and another, next to it, from which a dreadful smell issued. On one side of the yard was a five-barred gate, leading into a paddock at the back. When he got into the middle of the yard, he felt a steady pull on his head. He yielded to it at first, and the rope pulled him inch by inch towards the death-door. The rope had been passed through a hole in the wall of the slaughter-house,

and five men were pulling on at the other side. Realising the peril, he made one bound towards the gate, and the rope instantly slackened, the five men having momentarily been jerked off their legs. Into the gate he charged madly; but it withstood him, and then he tried desperately to scale it—death was very close behind, and gaining. He managed to get the forepart of his body over—then one foot caught for a moment, and he was lost. The men had meanwhile got up and pulled again. Steadily, surely, step by step, in blind terror, in unvoiced agony, death grew nearer. One more despairing effort was this time foiled, and a miscalculated rush brought him to the threshold. Now he was through the door. In a trice his head was pinned against the wall, before he knew what to struggle against. Almost immediately a crashing blow was delivered by the waiting butcher. Mercy!

The man had failed to hit fair, possibly from excitement, though it is not a rare occurrence.

The axe was wrenched out of the hard

bone. He waited dumbly for death, in fear and pain. Another. Mercy!

Would death *never* come? Again the pole-axe was wrenched free, and this time fell true, bearing with it merciful oblivion. It is not *always* so expeditious.

Smith sat up and rubbed his eyes. There were four or five of the men he had met last night seated round, looking curiously at him.

"Well," said Dundas, "how did you enjoy yourself? Relate your little experiences. Is it *very* painless, or only rather so?" He looked intently at Smith, who was very white and shaky.

"So far from relating my experiences, I shall try never to *think* of them—not wishing to go mad," replied Smith. "As to you, Dundas, I almost believe you are the devil. You would have been burnt as a wizard in the middle ages."

"Console yourself—I'm not the devil; but I've just shown you we have not *quite* improved him off the earth yet, and, until we develop a higher moral sense, we never shall!"



"IS IT VERY PAINLESS, OR ONLY RATHER SO?"



WRITTEN

BY

MAJOR

HAMYLTON FAIRLEIGH

GILBERT WALENN

BY

ILLUSTRATED



HE last day of the Poona Monsoon Races had proved disastrous to backers in general, to Lieutenant Thomas Clavering of the Wanowri Dragoons in particular.

"I've had a regular facer. Didn't spot a single winner the whole afternoon. 'Forlorn Hope,' who ought to have been a cert. for the Losers' Handicap, took it into his head to bolt off the course. I wish I'd ridden the brute myself instead of putting Snaffles up. It's no go. This cursed ill-luck follows me like a shadow. I think I shall chuck racing, and take to badminton and tea parties."

Thus spoke Tom to his crony and companion in misfortune, Jack Wilkinson of the Kirkee Fencibles, with whom he

was dining at the Club of Western India.

"Don't be down in the mouth, old chap! Cheer up, and never say die!" responded gaily the more philosophical Jack. You and I have landed many a good *comp* before now, and, please the pigs, will continue the motion."

"I wish I could take matters as coolly as you," said Clavering gloomily, envious of his comrade's irrepressible good humour. "I have dropped a pot to the bookies, and, what with lottery tickets and odd bets, the sum total of my liabilities is enough to make one's hair stand on end. I shall have to pull in my horns, by disposing of the whole of my stud except my two chargers. The polo ponies I don't so much mind parting

with; but I would have liked to keep 'Forlorn Hope,' as I have a superstition that, notwithstanding his poor performances hitherto, he will some day win a good race."

"You surely would not dream of selling F. H.," cried Wilkinson, aghast at the enormity of such a suggestion. "That would be burning your boats with a vengeance. I thought you had more grit in you, Tom, than to cave in so easily. No, no! Get rid of the polo ponies, if you like; but stick to the old nag that is destined"—in theatrical tones—"believe me, to retrieve our fallen fortunes."

"Perhaps you are right. I'll give the horse one more chance; but, if he fail me again, I shall put him up to auction, and he will probably end his days in a hack buggy."

"Forlorn Hope," a bay—three parts English countrybred, with lean, blood head, deep barrel, clean forelegs, powerful quarters, and muscular shoulders and loins, left, so far as appearances went, little to be desired; yet the ugly way he had of showing the whites of his eyes, and the vicious manner in which, when being mounted, he threw back his ears and "cow-kicked" were danger signals betraying the particular infirmity from which he suffered. Clavering, lured by a speciously-worded advertisement in the *Pioneer*, had, in his usual impulsive fashion, bought the horse without enquiring into his antecedents.

"A grand jumper, clever across country, with a rare turn of speed, sound as a bell," so had the advertisement run. "Forlorn Hope" possessed undoubtedly all the qualities ascribed to him; but, as his new owner soon discovered to his cost, he was one of the most excitable, cross-grained, uncertain-tempered equine fiends that ever looked through a bridle or disappointed his backers in or out of the saddle.

"Bravo, my pippin! You're one of the right sort after all," exclaimed Wilkinson joyfully. "We'll enter F. H. for the Grand Military Steeplechase at the Yarrowda Autumn Meeting, and you shall ride him yourself. With any luck, we shall recoup all our recent losses, and win a tidy bit over and above. As for our present liabilities—is not the

amiable and obliging Choga Lall ready to come down with the stiff to any amount? I've been as badly bitten as you have, but mean to have another shy at the bookies. You jump on my back and I'll jump on yours; in other words,—we'll do a bill and go security for each other with unlimited credit among the Shylocks of the bazaar. Why should we mind losing occasionally? We can always pay up on settling day, and come smiling to the scratch again." Then, turning to the waiter, "What ho, my sable Ganymede! Another bottle of the Boy, and put a dash of *jaldi** into it."

The two subs having drained their glasses to their favourite toast, "Our next merry meeting,"

"I hope," said Clavering, "that the Yarrowda Meeting will prove a merry one for us," which sentiment was echoed heartily by his friend.

The business with Choga Lall was easily arranged, for the astute *shroff*, knowing that his victims were in Government service, and that Clavering's uncle was a Member of Council, considered that in lending them money at 60 per cent. he was making a very safe and profitable investment. Clavering, in his laudable desire to retrench, sold his ponies, and even disposed of his smart, yellow-painted Norfolk cart, the envy and admiration of all the subalterns on the station, in which he used to drive tandem. He foreswore billiards and cards, and was generally considered to have turned over a new leaf. His hopes were centred on winning the Grand Military Steeplechase, but his secret was shared only by Jack Wilkinson.

Clavering, instead of exercising his horse in the orthodox fashion over the steeplechase course, trained him privately in long rides across country; and so efficacious did this system prove, that in a few weeks "Forlorn Hope" was pronounced by the admiring Jack Wilkinson to be as hard as a hammer, and fit to run for a king's ransom. While riding home late one evening, along the Parvati road, Clavering heard cries of distress, in a woman's voice, proceeding from some distance in front of him. Clapping spurs to his horse, he rode swiftly to the rescue, and on turning

* Quickly.

into a dark avenue bordered on one side by a tank, found a young native girl struggling with two Punjabi sepoys, one of whom was holding her down while the other was wrenching the ornaments from her arms. An old, white-bearded man lay helpless on the ground, with the blood welling from a wound in his forehead. The sepoys had barely time to drop their victim ere Clavering was upon them, and with the butt-end of his hunting crop had felled one ruffian senseless to the earth. The other sepoy, seizing the horse's bridle with a sharp jerk, caused the animal to rear wildly. Clavering slipped to the ground, when the sepoy instantly closing with him, a desperate struggle ensued.

Clavering had been in his schooldays a Rugby football player, and had thus acquired some knowledge of wrestling. This early training now stood him in good stead. The Punjabi, a man of powerful physique and an expert wrestler, strove mightily to force his adversary backwards into the tank, but the Englishman, though he felt his strength ebbing away under the terrible strain, succeeded for some time in holding his own. At last, Clavering, outmatched in weight and strength, began to lose ground; he was being forced back gradually foot by foot; the issue of the struggle seemed no longer doubtful, when succour arrived from an unexpected quarter. The old man, on recovering consciousness, jumped to his feet, unwound the long turban from his head, and twisting it deftly round the neck of the Punjabi, pulled both ends with all his strength, nearly throttling him. This timely diversion turned the scales in favour of Clavering, who, so soon as the grip of his opponent was relaxed, used both fists with telling effect, and floored his man like a ninepin. Then, with the assistance of his ally, he bound both the sepoys securely, and despatched the girl to summon the police guard from the nearest *chōki*.*

The old man, throwing himself weeping at his deliverer's feet, said in high-flown Urdu:

"Cherisher of the poor; you have

saved my life and my daughter's honour. Your bravery and kindness are inscribed in imperishable letters on the tablets of the memory of the humblest of your slaves, Hafiz Ali, the fortune-teller. Heaven will surely reward you for this day's work," and would have continued in the same strain, had not Clavering caused him to rise, and begged him to say nothing more, adding that he, in turn, owed his life to the old man's courage and presence of mind, and that therefore the account between them was balanced.

"Your honour's command is my law," replied Hafiz Ali respectfully; "but at least allow me to predict that good fortune, at no distant date, awaits you."

Clavering did not see Hafiz Ali again till the day before the races, when the old fortune-teller appeared at his bungalow, and asked to speak to him on business of much importance. After the usual interchange of salutations, Hafiz Ali said, "I have been told that your honour intends to ride in the great race to-morrow. If the Protector of the Poor will deign to grace with his acceptance a small offering from this miserable atom of humanity, he will to a surety bear off the prize, and cause the faces of his unworthy rivals to be blackened with the soot of defeat."

Drawing from a small bag a necklace of blue glass beads, and tendering it to Clavering, he continued, "If this talisman be placed round the neck of your honour's steed, that swift-footed one shall prevail, even though his opponents be as numerous as the sands of the desert. Hafiz Ali, the fortune-teller, pledges his reputation on the fulfilment of his prophecy."

Clavering, who had always affected to disbelieve the wonderful stories he had heard concerning the efficacy of Indian magic, felt his incredulity wavering before the solemnity of the old man's tones and the air of conviction with which he spoke. Was not the prophecy a confirmation of the superstition he secretly cherished concerning "Forlorn Hope"? With such thoughts in his mind he accepted the proffered gift, with many expressions of gratitude.

"You've got the straight tip this

* Police station.

time, Tom, and no mistake," said Jack Wilkinson, on being informed of the prophecy, "we'll put our shirts on 'Forlorn Hope' and make a small fortune out of him. A chance like this comes but once in a lifetime, so we'd better make the most of it."

The two subalterns astonished their friends that evening, by the reckless way in which they plunged at the lotteries and snapped up every bet they could book about "Forlorn Hope." On the following afternoon, Wilkinson, arriving early on the race-course, backed the horse with the bookmakers to such an extent, that finally the pencillers, becoming alarmed, declined to lay another farthing against "Forlorn Hope."

The Grand Military Steeplechase was the last event on the programme, and by the time the nine competitors had been marshalled for the start, the afternoon was far advanced. Owing to the fractiousness of "Forlorn Hope," who was in one of his most intractable moods, there were several false starts, and when at last the flag dropped, darkness was rapidly setting in. The starting-post was in full sight of the Grand

Stand; but the course wound round a village, on the far side of which, screened from the view of the spectators, was the principal obstacle, an "on and off" jump, composed of a steep bank, with a broad flat top and a ditch on either side. During the first part of the race, Clavering succeeded in keeping "Forlorn Hope" well in hand, a few lengths behind his field; but, on nearing the "on and off," which the remaining competitors had safely cleared, his horse, taking the bit between his teeth, made a wild rush at the obstacle and tried to clear it in his stride, with the result that he landed with his forefeet in the furthestmost ditch, and, turning a regular somersault, threw his rider heavily to the earth.

Clavering lay motionless where he had fallen; but when "Forlorn Hope" rose unhurt from the ground, a phantom jockey—the exact counterpart of the fallen man, and wearing his colours, violet and white—leaped into the saddle and started in hot pursuit of the rest. "Forlorn Hope" became, under his new rider's influence, perfectly docile, and, with speed and endurance increased



"THREW HIS RIDER HEAVILY"

tenfold, soon overtook and distanced the other horses.

"Violet and white leads. Violet and white for a hundred! 'Forlorn Hope' wins hands down," roared Wilkinson from the Grand Stand, when the colours of the leading jockey became distinguishable through the gloom.

Jack was right. The despised outsider sailed past the judge's box thirty lengths in front of his field. On the conclusion of the race, "Forlorn Hope's" jockey rode to the weighing tent, dismounted, and took his seat silently on the scales, and when the magic word "Weight" had been uttered, rose without a word, strode out and disappeared into the crowd.

"Clavering takes his victory calmly," remarked a brother officer to Wilkinson, who, laden with spoil, was returning flushed and elated from an eminently satisfactory interview with the bookmakers. "He wouldn't speak a word to any of us, and looked as if he'd just come from a funeral. He was as pale as a ghost, and there was a most uncanny look in his eyes. Perhaps his luck has been too much for him."

Wilkinson searched everywhere for his friend, and failing to find him, concluded that he had driven home alone.

Clavering, after being thrown from

his horse at the "on and off," remembered nothing more till he found himself entering his bungalow and being warmly congratulated on his splendid riding by Jack Wilkinson.

"Splendid riding!" he stammered in amazement, "Bar chaff, Jack, for I am in no humour for it. My usual infernal luck is dogging me still; I was chucked off and left behind, and I'm blowed if I know how I found my way home."

"Left behind. That's a good 'un," roared Jack. "I tell you what it is, my boy; that peg you took in the refreshment tent, after the race, was too strong for you, and you've forgotten what happened. Look here!" producing from his pocket a thick roll of currency notes received from the bookmakers. "Three thousand of the very best, and more to follow. All won on 'Forlorn Hope.' Left behind! Why he was a street in front of the next horse."

Clavering professed himself satisfied with this plausible explanation and forebore wisely from making any further allusion to the subject; yet, there are times when he cannot divest himself of a shrewd suspicion that his success in the Grand Military Steeplechase was due in some mysterious way to the magic properties of the blue necklace.





A PERSIAN SHEPHERD

BY W. B. WALLACE, D.D.

Illustrated by H. L. SHANDLER.

MANY centuries ago there lived at the base of the Elburz mountains, in the north of Persia, not far from where the gigantic volcanic peak of Demavend soars aloft to an altitude of nearly 20,000 feet, a shepherd named Arbaces.

Arbaces was poor, but he prided himself upon his descent from the royal stock of that famous Darius Hystaspes, as the Greeks called him, who was the first to organise the unwieldy body politic of the Persian Empire, and who, on the whole, certain conspicuous military failures notwithstanding, may perhaps be considered the greatest and wisest monarch, after the Hebrew Solomon, that Asia has ever produced.

Now, a lofty lineage is more frequently a curse than a blessing, when the possessor of the *sangre azul* has inherited nothing else of more marketable value from his ancestors, and is compelled to toil for his daily bread, like any ordinary plebeian.

When following his flock, Arbaces would often muse upon the ancient glories of the Achæmenids, and the comparatively recent achievements of the Arsacids; and while his sheep were busy, nibbling the scanty mountain herbage which Nature afforded

with niggard hand in those desolate and sterile regions, their master, although near them in the flesh, would in spirit be far away in the dreamland of glowing and gorgeous fancies, with kingly tiara upon his head and flashing scimitar in his hand, driving before him, not a score or two of lean and famished sheep, but hordes of vanquished foes.

But Arbaces, at times, dreamt other dreams.

He loved the fair Zulima; and Zulima, whom in his wild imaginations he glorified under the imperial title of Atossa, played an important part in all his visions. When, in fancy, he mounted the throne royal of Persia, and drained deep draughts of the sparkling juice of the grapes of Shiraz, or the clear pure water of the snow-fed Choaspes, Zulima was ever at his side, with queenly diadem on her brow, golden sandals on her tiny feet, and soft Serican vestments draping her graceful form—ever at his side, his beloved, his consort, the sharer in his joys, his victories, his triumphs.

Zulima was as poor, in worldly possessions, as her lover, but she was quite free from that spirit of unrest, discontent, and ambition which desolated his life. And she was rich in her youth and in her beauty. A true

Oread, the fresh mountain breezes had bestowed upon her the roses that bloomed upon her cheeks, and the hardy adventurous life of the mountains had given grace to her carriage, elasticity to her step, light to her eyes, and indomitable hope and energy and courage to her heart. Neither vision nor thought ever strayed beyond the boundaries of her native hills and valleys.

To be candid however, although she loved him dearly, Zulima was somewhat afraid of Arbaces; and this was the one sorrow of her gentle life. She feared him most when, with gloomy and preoccupied air, and seemingly unconscious or regardless of the fact that her tearful eyes were bent, half beseechingly, half reproachfully, upon him, he would stride away, without a word or caress, to bury himself in the gloomy fastnesses of Elburz.

It was in one of these dark rebellious moods that Arbaces, on a certain day, sought a pathless solitude amid the most desolate wastes of the mountains, where he began to utter aloud his complaints.

"Accursed is my fate," he cried. "Treble accursed be the day of my birth! Would that I had never seen the light of yon sun! Non-existence were surely preferable to a life like this—the life of a slave. I, the descendant of Darius, the Great King—I, who feel myself in heart and soul a monarch—I, forsooth, am condemned, by a cruel and mocking destiny, to tend a few sheep in the wilderness, to eat out mine heart, from youth to age, in vain repinings, to curse each day the planet that presided at my natal hour, to dream at intervals radiant dreams, only to wake to the realities of poverty and misery, and then, in my hopeless anguish, to call upon the frowning peaks to fall and crush this aspiring heart with all its futile longings.

"How often have I prayed to Demavend to send forth once more, as in the days of old, the devouring flames that circle at his heart, if haply they might bear me away on their seething torrent to that Nothingness which is the only haven that I can hope for.

Help from earth or man I need not expect. Oh, is there indeed no Power above or beneath to listen and save!"

While giving expression to these daring thoughts, Arbaces was sitting, in an attitude of deep dejection, on a rough fragment of stone, in his favourite resort, a natural amphitheatre, girdled by inaccessible mountains. The one entrance to this scene of desolation, which seemed like a trysting-place of the evil genii, was through a narrow pass, which could only be reached through tortuous defiles and by-paths which led the wayfarer along the edges of dizzy precipices where far beneath his feet, the screaming eagles circled round their eyries. It was, indeed, a region of savage gloom. A few patches of dry, coarse, matted grass dotted the expanse here and there, and a number of giant boulders, transported thither by the winter torrents, lay scattered over its surface, while round it on every side rose the black basaltic wall, which no foot of man might climb and no pinion of bird might cross. A congenial spot for dark and desperate spirits! A fitting stage for such soliloquies as that to which Arbaces had just given utterance!

The almost imperceptible sound of a slight movement behind him caused the despondent shepherd to turn, not, indeed, in alarm—for he knew not fear—but in extreme surprise.

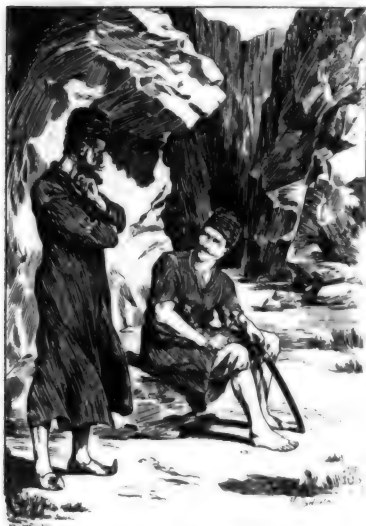
A tall, dark man, with keen, hungry, glittering eyes that seemed to scan the heart, and to pierce the soul as with cold, biting steel, stood close by his elbow.

"My son," said the stranger, regarding him steadfastly, "thou art sick at heart."

"Well hast thou guessed my malady, my father. But thou art a stranger, and——"

"Art thou sure, O Arbaces, that I am a stranger?"

Arbaces, viewing more attentively the weird figure before him, suddenly bethought him that twice or thrice lately, in his lonely wanderings, a shape resembling that of this mysterious personage had crossed his path. He remembered now that once, when overtaken by a tempest beneath Mount



"A TALL, DARK MAN, WITH
KEEN, HUNGRY, GLITTERING
EYES STOOD CLOSE BY HIS . . .
ELBOW."

Demavend, he had seen what appeared to be a human form, standing alone upon an inaccessible peak, dark, silent and unmoved, while the deadly lightning leaped and flashed above, around, and beneath the pointed rocky pinnacle. Once, too, at evening, on the shores of a lonely tarn, and once before in that very amphitheatre, the same inscrutable presence had passed, scarcely heeded, before his dreamy eyes.

"Yes, I remember that I have seen thee ere now," said the shepherd slowly, "and ever at moments when my heart burned within me and my spirit chafed like a mountain lake that starts and quivers first, and then boils beneath the spirit of the tempest. Once, methought, I saw thee standing where no mortal foot hath ever trod, while the firmamental fires enwrapped thee like a garment."

An icy smile flitted across the sombre

features of the Unknown, as he said, "Verily, then, and at other seasons, have I been near, ever ready to help, hadst thou but craved for succour. That thou hast never done, although mine ear hath been attentive to mark thy lightest word. To-day, for the first time, hath thy proud spirit been bent to sue to the Immortals."

Arbaces started from his rocky seat, and, raising himself to the full height of his lofty stature, abruptly faced his subtle interlocutor.

"Who and what art thou?" he cried.

"One who is able to accomplish the dearest wishes of thy secret heart," calmly responded the stranger.

Arbaces was silent in amazement.

"Young man," he continued, "thou art an Achæmenid, masquerading in shepherd's weeds. Gladly wouldest thou fling away the peaceful crook to grasp spear and falchion first, and then

royal crown and sceptre by their means; fain wouldest thou revive the ancient glories and conquests of the Medes and Persians; and then wouldest thou place thy fair Zulima upon the throne of the prostrate East. All this wouldest thou do, and an aspiring soul whispereth within thee that all this thou mightest do wert thou not hemmed in by the brazen walls of necessity, obscurity and poverty, which cramp and confine thy spirit as these frowning basaltic precipices do the amphitheatre in which we stand. Well, I say unto thee, Arbaces, that I am able to level these brazen walls with the breath of my mouth, to set thee free, to place thy feet upon the path of conquest, to crown thee monarch of Asia, to make of thee a Persian Alexander, and of thy Zulima an Atossa indeed."

While the stranger spoke his dark-robed form seemed to dilate, his voice was as the voice of the torrent, and in his eyes shone the lightnings of Demavend; but for all this the haughty descendant of Darius quailed not.

"What wouldest thou in return for all these glories?" was all he said.

"Follow me, and thou shalt learn," replied the Unknown.

Arbaces rapidly revolved the situation. He was a man of matchless strength and vigour. Danger he feared not, and death itself he had already braved more than once. He had not blenched then. Why should he do so now? This adventure, terminate as it might, was at least a change in the blank monotony of his existence. If the stranger's promises were realised, he would emerge at one bound from the dark depths of obscurity into the light of fame. At the worst he could but die.

And so his resolution was taken.

Looking straight into the dark visage before him, he fearlessly said, "Whoever thou art, I follow thee. I dread nothing; I dare all things."

Again those lurid eyes emitted an instantaneous flash, even as the flint does when "much enforced," but the emotion thus betokened, whether it arose from surprise or contempt, quickly passed away, and he preceded Arbaces in silence.

They emerged from the amphitheatre,

and presently entered upon a devious and rugged track, which, well as he thought he knew the recesses of the Elburz, Arbaces was utterly ignorant of. His companion, with swift, gliding motion, and no apparent effort, led the way over the débris of fallen rocks, along the brink of yawning chasms, where a slip meant instantaneous destruction, over the myriad obstacles which Nature seems to strew in the way of those rash intruders who would surprise her in her secret haunts. Had not the shepherd's foot been swift and sure as that of the mountain goat; had not his brain been clear and his courage high, he would assuredly have fallen a victim to one or other of the dangers of the aerial path, and have afforded a meal to the hungry vultures that kept whirling in wide gyrations above his head, apparently anticipating such an eventuality. As for aid, his guide proffered him none, and he would have scorned either to ask or accept it.

After about an hour's progress through these perils, the way gradually widened, and at last conducted them to the outskirts of a gloomy forest of gigantic pines.

Still following upon the rapid footsteps of his guide, Arbaces boldly struck into these savage wilds. His course was now easier. He had beneath him the fallen pine cones, which from their abundance seemed to have accumulated there from time immemorial; and although the free currents of the mountain air no longer beat upon his temples, he felt cheered and invigorated by the strong balsamic odour diffused by the mighty boles around him.

Upon first entering this wood he had noticed an obscure and distant sound of a monotonous character. As he advanced this sound grew more distinct, and he at last perceived that it was caused by the rush and fall of waters. At every onward step this hoarse thunder grew louder and louder, till at last the tall figure and flowing black caftan of the stranger became stationary, and Arbaces, hurrying up, rejoined him.

"Thou art indeed worthy of Susa, Ecbatana, and all the hidden treasures of Istakhar," cried the latter. "Few are the mortals who could have kept

pace with my footsteps upon the mountains of Elburz."

"And none of mortal mould," returned the shepherd, "could have outstripped Arbaces as thou hast done amid the fastnesses where first he saw the light. Again I ask, who and what art thou?"

For answer the other gazed at him with a weird and awful smile.

"Like a countryman of the great Cyrus thou hast spoke sooth, Arbaces; like an impetuous youth, thou hast questioned rashly. Who and what am I? Wouldest thou indeed know?"

"Yea; I had not followed thee else," was the prompt rejoinder.

"Cease thy dark sayings. Some proof I have given thee that I am no craven; and more are forthcoming if need be. Do thou give some token of thy vaunted might as well as of thy agility. Help me, if thou hast the power, whoever and whatever thou art."

The Unknown folded his arms upon his breast and kept silence for a brief space, as though pondering the shepherd's words, while Arbaces, assuming an air of indifference, turned aside and looked forth upon a scene which presented a complete contrast to his usual surroundings.

He and his mysterious guide were standing upon an isolated mass of rock, jutting out over a black caldron-like pool, well-nigh two hundred feet below them, into which fell with collected volume and with a tremendous crash, the waters of a broad, deep river which flowed close by them. From a cranny in the rock on which they stood, wherein some earthy deposit afforded a scanty sustenance to its roots, there grew a gnarled and distorted tree, whose long creeping branches seemed to point, like skeleton fingers, to the dark abysmal caldron beneath, which was constantly fed by the seething waters of the cataract, and yet ever appeared to gape for more.

As Arbaces surveyed the scene with curious eye he was surprised to note that the foam of the cataract, far from ascending in a white filmy vapour, as of incense, to the heavens, hung in dense heavy clouds above the surface of the

pool, which, he fancied, emitted, from time to time, bubbles and even tongues of gloomy flame.

The general effect of all that he saw in this strange spot was depressing in the extreme. The secret agencies of nature seemed to have conspired together to produce a picture calculated to strike the mind of the observer with awe and fill it with despondency, by means of its shifting and terrific chiaroscuro. All that was soft, gentle, simple, touching, or capable of inspiring hope or evoking tender memories was banished. Here were no jewelled cups of Flora, here came no tawny bees, here carolled no joyous birds, here glowed no golden haze. In the background rose the funereal, shadowy pines; in the foreground the suicidal torrent rushed to its doom in the pool, black as the fabled Waters of Oblivion over which was poised the crag with its spectral tree; all around were gloomy rocks of fantastic and horrible shapes, like monsters turned into stone; and lastly—fit music for such an orchestra—there soared to the leaden skies in awful pæan the ceaseless, threatening, thunderous roar of many waters.

But the stranger's pause was but brief. Slowly descending from the rock by a zigzag path which led to the edge of the pool already mentioned, he conducted Arbaces to a point where the way terminated in a spit of sand, or miniature beach, from which ascended, almost perpendicularly and to a considerable height above the level of the river, a beetling cliff, as inky in hue as the sullen pool beside which it towered. Where this cliff abutted upon the narrow stretch of sand, and flush with the latter, Arbaces perceived a dark aperture, resembling in its external aspect the entrance to one of those caves or natural tunnels wherewith that mighty and persevering engineer Oceanus has honeycombed the rock-bound coast of Sark.

Into the impenetrable darkness of this orifice his guide plunged without a word, while the shepherd, laying his right hand upon the hilt of his scimitar, still boldly trod upon his steps.

On they went, through low, narrow, tortuous galleries in the living rock,

where the atmosphere was a compound of noxious and mephitic gases, hot, loathsome, and overpowering, and where, ever and anon, the foot slipped upon the slimy pavement or stumbled against some opposing fragment of stone. In these sepulchral regions the visual sense was useless, and the hand continually encountered cold, noisome, nameless creatures of the darkness, which with their silent writhings and frantic struggles to escape thrilled their involuntary captor to the bone. Undeterred, however, by these manifold horrors, the brave mountaineer held on his desperate course, through the foul obscurity. Sometimes he fancied that he could hear the rustle of his guide's flowing garments, but of this he was not certain. Fortunate was it for him that no side galleries branched off from the infernal tunnel, or he must inevitably have lost his way. He noticed that the path trended gradually downwards, and that the feverish throbbing of his temples and the difficulty in respiration increased at every step.

At last, after a period of agony which seemed to him as long as the weary æons to lost souls in the halls of Eblis, he descried a light in the distance, dusky-red as the moon when she slowly rises over the fens through banks of fog and marsh-vapours. This sufficed to rouse his flagging energies. Larger and brighter glowed the ruddy beams, wider and loftier grew the corridor, and faster and ever faster sped Arbaces. Ere long he had reached the source of the ruby beams which had guided his wandering steps.

The Unknown received him beneath a Cyclopean arch, through which had streamed the beckoning radiance.

"Well hast thou stood the ordeal of valour, O Arbaces!" he said, "both on mountain heights and in subterranean ways. And now welcome to the abode of Manes."

Briefly acknowledging these greetings, Arbaces glanced around him with a bewildered air. Accustomed, alone, to the rugged, the terrible, and the majestic in Nature, he was a stranger to the magic devices of art and the costly luxuries of civilisation. His dreams

of conquest, and its golden fruits of splendour, had been vague, and had their foundation in old traditions of the glories of the Persian kings—not, of course, in any actual experience of the pomp and magnificence which the conquerors of the earth can command. Such knowledge had hitherto lain far beyond the grasp of the shepherd of the Elburz. But now a revelation had come.

He found himself standing in a spacious hall, to which, looking into the dim perspective, he could discern no limits. Supernatural art and force had evidently hewn it out of the stony bowels of the earth, as similar agencies had wrought the mighty Domdaniel caves beneath the roots of the hoary ocean. High up above his head he saw the groined and interlacing arches of the black basaltic roof; while a continuous rumbling sound, as of muffled thunder or falling water, similar to that which he had heard in the pine forest, suggested the idea that he was actually beneath some vast and turbid volume of water. This sound, awful at first, but to which the ear in time became accustomed,—like the plash of a fountain, which deepens rather than disturbs the slumber of the wayfarer who rests by its side—lent its aid, with the other accessories of this wondrous palace, to lull the senses into a delicious lethargy.

The ground was covered with carpets richer than any that the patient Hindu has ever produced, and of hues brighter, warmer, and more diversified than those wherewith Spring paints the meadows, when in her most prodigal mood. Just in front of Arbaces a balas ruby, large as a roc's egg—the source and origin of the red light which had directed him in the latter portion of his pilgrimage—hung suspended from the roof by golden chains, and flooded the hall with its rays of vivid crimson, slightly tinged with orange; while the atmosphere was impregnated with the subtle odour of ambergris, whose vapour arose from jewelled censers disposed along the walls, which were draped with hangings of red silk, embroidered with gold and gems.

Beneath the immense ruby which

illuminated the subterranean palace was a large rectangular slab, consisting of polished black marble, supported at the corners by four kneeling Ethiopians, who formed, as it were, the props of this strange altar—whether living and breathing men or wonderfully realistic counterfeits of life, Arbaces could not discern. On the slab there lay a complete suit of glittering armour, richly damascened, a tiara blazing with diamonds, and other gems of apparently inestimable value, a falchion whose hilt was composed of a single smaragdus, and whose golden scabbard was covered with inscriptions in mystic characters, and, beside this dazzling heap, a parchment roll.

The eyes of Arbaces sparkled with joy when he beheld the warlike gear; but a yet more wondrous sight quickly overcame the attraction of this potent loadstone. Drawn up on each side of the magnificent but sombre hall, upon pedestals of gold, stood, like sentinels on guard, images of kings, chieftains, and warriors, gloriously arrayed in the costumes and bearing the native arms of Assyria, Media, Persia, Armenia, and other ancient and famous lands of the Orient. The sculptor's efforts had in every case been crowned with such startling success that the figures seemed—as has been said of the statues of Phidias and Michael Angelo—actually to live and breathe!

Alas! the life which the Master had given them, to judge from the awful woe stereotyped upon their faces, was one of mute but terrible agony, and their attitude was uniform and typical of some dire mystery; each effigy bore in uplifted right hand a fearfully realistic presentment of a throbbing, pulsating human heart—fearfully realistic indeed, with the exception of the following points of divergence. The important organ in question is, as anatomy knows it, opaque; these were transparent. Moreover, our hearts are only metaphorically described, in common parlance, as being *inflamed* with the various passions of love, hatred, revenge, and ambition, with which, in their useful but prosaic capacity of mere force-pumps, they have in reality nothing whatever to do; but these beating, palpitating, diaphanous

hearts were literally so many miniature founts of fire, and continually emitted sparks of that vivid flame which ever enwrapped but failed to consume them.

These awful motionless forms—whose splendid raiment served only to accentuate the hopeless misery of their aspect—actually wearing on face and limb the tints of life itself, and each sustaining in lieu of torch, a flaming heart, had, as we have said, irresistibly chained the attention of Arbaces; but what was the horror which invaded even his stout breast when he noticed that all those terrible stony eyes were fixed upon him—some in sadness and pity, some in wrath, some in bitter and contemptuous derision; yes, fixed upon him for an instant, and then as rapidly turned, drawing his captivated eyes along with them, with grim and unmistakable meaning, to a gap in their ranks where stood a still empty pedestal!

Although it has taken us long to describe all this, it will be readily understood that the mind of Arbaces—observant, receptive, and acute, although untutored—had grasped the details of the impressive but ghastly spectacle before him in the brief pause which had ensued after the welcome given him by the extraordinary being who had announced himself under the name of Manes.

"What thinkest thou of my Hall of Imagery, O Arbaces?" enquired Manes, whose malignant and searching eyes had never left the countenance of the young man from the very first moment of his entrance.

"Of a truth, O Manes, these images are very majestic, and would seem to be those of the mighty ones of the earth."

"Rightly hast thou guessed. Here stand the kings and conquerors of the world from time immemorial. Assyria, Babylonia, Media, Persia, and even older empires have all their representatives in the Hall of Manes. They were my friends, and the vassals of the formidable Master whom I serve."

"Thy Master, I ween, is One whose name the earth trembleth to hear," said Arbaces. "But wherefore are the countenances of all darkened with such ineffable misery?"

"These effigies," replied Manes, with

a sneer, which he was unable to conceal, "are true to life. All these men have lived the life of conquerors: they have led their fellows, sometimes driven them, even as thou drivest thy sheep from pasture to pasture. Thou knowest not yet, my son, but thou shalt surely one day know that the possession of unlimited power, and the consequent sense of responsibility, aye engender sorrow of heart, and that the sceptre of royalty and the smile of beauty cannot exorcise the worm that gnaweth the heart of man."

"Talkest thou of hearts?" hastily rejoined Arbaces. "Strange it is, methinks, that these should bear in their right hands the likenesses of human hearts, encircled by and vomiting forth fire!"

"Marvel not at that, Arbaces"—and the tone of the speaker chilled the hearer's soul—" 'tis but a beautiful symbol. These treasured images bear hearts in their hands to signify that they had and have no secrets hidden from my Master and myself; and the flames—the flames are merely eloquent of the burning love and adoration which they felt, and still feel, for us, their benefactors."

Arbaces, happening to look up at the moment, saw with consternation the eyes of the dread sentinels of the place of enchantment glaring upon Manes with a fearful expression of deadly and impotent hatred, which strangely belied his statement.

"And now, O Arbaces," continued Manes, who, noticing the incredulous glance and clouded brow of the young shepherd, appeared anxious to divert him from his thoughts and turn the conversation into another channel, "prepare for thy lofty destiny, and come hither." So saying, he led the way to the altar-slab, which we have already described.

Laying his hand on the dazzling panoply, surmounted by the kingly diadem, and addressing Arbaces, he cried in thrilling accents, "Here, here lieth the fulfilment of thy dreams. Here be weapons forged by immortal hands. Handle this sword, tempered and tried in subterranean fires. Behold the lofty tiara of universal sovereignty, the gift of Ahriman himself. No blade of Damas-

cus may pierce this panoply; no shield, no corselet, no Roman cataphract, no armour fashioned on earth may resist the trenchant force of that magic falchion. With these shalt thou drive the aliens before thee, as now thy drivest thy timid flock through the ravines of Elburz. And then shalt thou bind upon thy brow the glorious symbol of world-wide dominion, and Zulima shall sit at thy footstool."

"And are all these mine?" enquired Arbaces.

"Yea," replied Manes, in eager tones; "sign but this roll acknowledging thyself true vassal of my Master, and kneel in homage to me as his Minister. All these, whose images thou seest, have done so before thee."

"Ahriman, the Power of Evil, the Prince of Darkness, is thy Master? And thou—?"

"Mortal, I am Manes, the Spirit of Demavend. With other lofty intelligences—whom men call genii—I serve the august Ahriman, the Power of Evil and the Prince of Darkness, as thou sayest, but co-equal and co-existent with Yezad, and holding with him divided sway over the universe. Under him I rule these mountain caves and fastnesses, and the deep eternal fires of Demavend. Your Yezad is a distant god, but Ahriman is ever near, and to him especially the kingdoms of the earth belong. He assigneth them unto thee. Write, and do obeisance, thou fortunate youth. Glory and riches and honour and power are thine—till thou art weary of them. Then shalt thou come and rest with me for ever in this, my Hall of Imagery."

So spake the juggling Spirit, little guessing with what manner of man he had to deal.

Arbaces sprang back from the altar and boldly confronted the Spirit of Demavend, while his eyes flashed with the indignation which he had long restrained.

"Surely thou errest, false Spirit," he cried: "thou speakest not to a cringing Greek of Byzantium, whose supple knees will bend this way and that if he but scent lucre. I am a Persian, free as the air of these mountains. Neither to thee nor to Ahriman do I bow. So

much for homage! And next, O Manes, Lord of Demavend, I would thank thee for the service which thou hast unwittingly rendered me. Much have I learned within this, thy Hall of Imagery—enough to prevent me from ever joining the ranks of thy victims here," glancing at the long lines of living statues. "Truly the sheen of yon diadem and the splendour of the shield and hauberk are pleasant in mine eyes, and fain would I carve with yonder magic glaive a way to honour and renown. But even these treasures may be too dearly bought. How should it profit me to rule the earth for a season, and then adorn these accursed Halls for ever, a living image of wrath, bearing mine own heart, enveloped in penal flames, in the right hand of mine iniquity. Grievously have I sinned in the past, but henceforth I forswear the vain dreams that have left me a prey to thy deadly temptations."

A mocking laugh burst from Manes.

"Hear me, O Yezad!" continued the young man, with impassioned voice, his eyes uplifted to the vault of the infernal chamber. "If thou wilt but deliver me from the snare of the fowler, I swear never again to vex thy heavens with the impious cries of discontent, but rather bow before thy dispensations here in all humility, and with the hope that those glories which earth denieth me may yet be mine beyond the earth, beyond the sun, beyond the stars, where thou reignest."

Scarce had these thrilling words been uttered when the dark caftan fell from Manes. Awful, but indistinct, and apparently clad in black armour, the form of the djin, mighty as that of Azazel, towered to the lofty roof. His baleful eyes, twin comets of destruction, glared upon Arbaces.

"Fool!" he thundered, "back to thy sheep!"

So saying he poised a shadowy javelin, as if to transfix the fearless shepherd.

With a roar as of many waters in his ears—with light, blinding and intolerable, in his eyes, Arbaces was hurled to the ground by a merciless and irresistible force.

* * * *



"THE FORM OF THE DJIN, MIGHTY AS THAT OF AZAZEL, TOWERED TO THE LOFTY ROOF"

When the shepherd recovered his senses, he found himself, to his intense relief and surprise, in his old retreat, the sandy amphitheatre, close by the rock where he had so often sat in discontented reverie. His head was pillowed upon the bosom of Zulima, who, alarmed by his long absence, had braved the perils of the mountain way, and found her lover in a state of unconsciousness—and her tender eyes were the first sight he beheld as he slowly woke to thought and life once more.

"Love and contentment are better than ambition," was the rather trite sentiment which found its way from the heart to the tongue of Arbaces, as he descended to the valley with Zulima.

It was endorsed—and yet not verbally—by the lips of his happy companion.



A TRUE STORY OF THE SUPERNATURAL

WRITTEN BY RUSSELL PHILLIPS ILLUSTRATED BY LEONARD M. NOBLE

IN relating the following curious story, it has been my endeavour to describe the various incidents as they actually occurred, and, having obtained the permission of the persons chiefly concerned to make the facts public, I leave my readers to offer what explanation they can of the extraordinary sequence of events which came quite recently under my own immediate notice, and which will be found narrated in the following pages.

A little more than a month before writing this, having been ordered rest and change of air, I gladly accepted the invitation of a relative to spend a few days at his place in Hampshire,

which, situated as it is on the borders of a pine wood, and distant about three miles from the sea, was just the spot in which to regain health and vigour.

Upon my arrival, I was delighted to find three other visitors in the house besides myself; a Mrs. Ranleigh, one of the most charming and up-to-date old ladies imaginable, an artist named Dickson, whom I had met once or twice before, and his college chum, Walter Darrell, a fine, athletic young fellow, of six-and-twenty, who was, I was given to understand, an author of some promise, his literary efforts having already met with appreciation in the right quarters.

We were a merry party, and the first

few days passed pleasantly enough, my returning energies enabling me to enjoy to the full the opportunities of taking out-of-door exercise which the bright spring weather afforded us.

One morning, young Darrell, returning from his accustomed bicycle ride, burst into the library in a state of great excitement, having heard in the village strange stories concerning Grantlebury Grange, a house not more than eight miles distant, which had been untenanted for many years, owing, it was said, to a weird prophecy in connection with two skulls, which were still to be found in one of the rooms of the house. The prophecy, as far as he could make out, ran as follows:—"If anyone buried the skulls, everything within a mile would die, and if anyone touched or meddled with the skulls, they would within twelve hours pass through the "Valley of the Shadow of Death."

The former part of the prophecy was known to have been fulfilled more than once, and the latter on three distinct occasions, and, in consequence, so great was the horror and dread of the place, that nobody had dared to approach it for years.

Darrell was especially interested in what he had heard, for he was just then engaged upon a story dealing with supernatural events, and he expressed a determination, at all hazards, to visit Grantlebury Grange, which, he felt sure, would afford him excellent matter for his new book.

My uncle, who was busily engaged upon a sketch at the far end of the room when Darrell had entered, left his easel as the latter finished speaking, and walking towards the window, he remained there in silence for a few moments; then, turning abruptly to Darrell, he remarked sharply that he would be extremely annoyed if any guest of his went to Grantlebury Grange from his house, and in fact, expressed himself so strongly upon the subject, that we all thought it wise to let the matter drop for the time.

As soon as my uncle left the room, however, the conversation was resumed, and I was not a little annoyed to find that Darrell, in spite of my uncle's somewhat violent opposition, was fully

resolved upon carrying out his intention of visiting Grantlebury Grange, the opportunity, he said, was not one to be missed.

After dinner that evening, as we all sat round the fire in the library, the night having closed in damp and chilly, my uncle startled us by suddenly referring to the episode of the morning, and, partly I imagine, as an apology to Darrell for the severity of his tone on that occasion, and partly as an explanation of his conduct, he, with a certain amount of hesitation unusual in him, related to us the following facts.

Many years ago Grantlebury Grange was the property of the De Beausarts, an old and wealthy family, whose reputation, however, did not appear to have been of a particularly enviable nature, and the story ran, that the beautiful Lady De Beausart had been the cause of a duel to the death, between her husband and his intimate friend, and, so great had been the fury of the combatants, that in the course of the fight, part of the scalp of the one, and the chin of the other was cut clean away, and the two men were found in the morning lying dead amidst pools of blood in the dining-room, where they had fought. The whole household appears to have fled terror-stricken from the place, and nothing more was ever heard of the wife, but the most gruesome part of the story was that the bodies of the unfortunate combatants were never buried, and the terrible curse or prophecy—call it what you will—of which Darrell had been informed that morning, had been in existence ever since, and authenticated instances could be produced at the present day, where the prophecy had been fulfilled in so remarkable a manner, that the superstitious horror with which the place was regarded was fully accounted for.

My uncle went on to tell us how, when quite a lad, he had been taken, at his own express desire, to see the house, concerning which he had heard so many strange rumours, and he well remembered, he said, the terrible scene of desolation which presented itself as he peered through the great iron gates which stood some way back from the

high road. The grass had grown to the height of several feet, and what had once been the carriage road, was a tangled mass of thistles and weeds of every description, the unlopped branches of the trees stretching out their twisted limbs in all directions, while in the distance, just a little to the left, rose the dark grey gables of the Grange, and its tall chimneys towering high above the trees.

The whole place gave one the impression of intense dreariness and melancholy, and this was further enhanced by the deathlike stillness which prevailed, no sign of bird life, or of the existence of any living creature being apparent.

My uncle frankly admitted that the uncanny aspect of the place and its surroundings produced an extraordinary effect upon his nerves, so much so, that he felt no desire to make any further explorations, and, he added, he had never been able to shake off the feeling of indefinable dread which seized him as he left the place. Reason how he would, he could not rid himself of the idea that disaster would inevitably overtake anyone placing themselves within the reach of the fateful prophecy, and he had resolved to do his utmost to prevent any intending visitor to Grantlebury Grange from setting foot in the accursed place!

Our host here paused for a few moments, then looking across at Darrell, he said earnestly, "And now, Walter, I want you to promise me that you will give up the idea of going on this mad expedition. Believe me I have my reasons for asking you to do so, and I feel sure you will respect my wishes." Darrell made some laughing reply, which I did not catch, and Mrs. Ranleigh, observing that the hour was growing late, we all rose and parted for the night.

The next morning broke fine and cloudless, and, as was the custom of the house, we all went our several ways, being given perfect freedom to spend the morning as we pleased, until lunch time. Darrell, however, volunteered the information that he intended riding over to Sheel to visit an uncle, who was the rector of the parish, and if he could induce his cousin, Dick Bravington,

who had just returned from India, to accompany him, they would probably go for a spin together, in which case he would not return until late in the afternoon.

My uncle did not look particularly pleased, I thought, but he said nothing, and it was not until some time after Darrell's departure that it suddenly flashed across my mind that Sheel was on the Grantlebury road. The idea, however, that the two young men would make the Grange their destination, I endeavoured to dismiss at once from my mind, but the impression I had previously formed of Darrell's determined nature, forced itself upon me, and I could not help feeling more and more uneasy as the afternoon wore on.

My uncle, too, I noticed, appeared nervous and depressed, but we did not exchange our views upon the subject which I felt sure was uppermost in both our minds.

It was with a feeling of intense relief, therefore, that soon after half-past six o'clock the cheery ring of a bicycle bell was heard, and Darrell entered the house, and went straight up to his room to dress for dinner, which was at seven o'clock, and always most punctually served.

Being dressed in good time for once, I tapped at Darrell's door before going downstairs, and, receiving permission to enter, at once proceeded to set my doubts at rest as to how his day had been spent; imagine my dismay when I found that his cousin Dick Bravington, having been regaled at lunch with the whole story of Grantlebury Grange, had insisted on having an afternoon's sport—as he expressed it—and the other's scruples having been eventually overcome they had set forth and reached the "Grange" about four o'clock.

They found the massive iron gates firmly barred, but the walls having in many places given way, they soon succeeded in getting through into the grounds, and after a tough battle with the thick undergrowth, which made their progress somewhat difficult, they at length reached the house.

An entrance was effected through a side door, which, at a vigorous kick from Bravington, fell with a crash from its

hinges, and ascending a dark and dismal staircase, lighted by one small window, so covered with dust and cobwebs as to be hardly discernible, they found themselves in a large square hall from which several doors led off.

One of the doors was observed to be slightly open, and after a certain amount of persuasion, it turned creaking and groaning upon its rusty hinges, and the young explorers, amidst a cloud of dust, and the scuttling of many rats, entered.

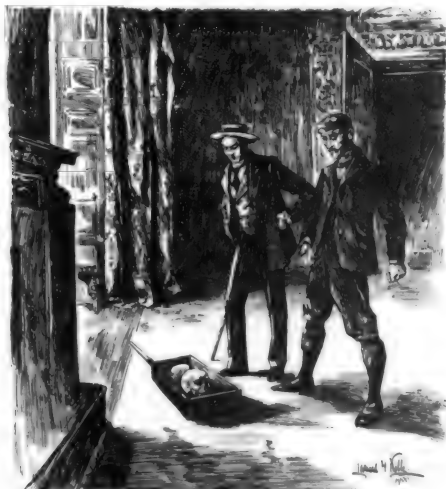
The whole atmosphere of the place breathed ruin and decay, and with a feeling of curiosity, not unmingled with awe, they glanced round the room in silence.

There were still the remains of furniture and hangings, which had probably, in their day, been handsome enough, but now the tapestry hung in shreds upon the walls, and the high-backed chairs looked as though a touch would send them tottering to the ground.

After inspecting the various objects for a few moments, Bravington made a sudden move towards the mantelpiece, and in the fading light they were able to discern a square-looking object standing upon it, which appeared to be a box about two feet square, but so covered with dust that it was impossible to tell of what it was made.

Bravington motioned to Darrell to assist him in lifting the box from its position, and together they carried it to the window and placed it upon the floor. It proved to be extremely light, and upon further examination was found to possess a lid, made evidently of glass, from which, as they raised it, the dust fell in cakes. A sight then met their eyes which recalled vividly the gruesome legend connected with the place in which they found themselves. They both involuntarily stepped back a pace, for there, at the bottom of the box, lay the dreaded skulls, bearing plainly

"THERE, AT THE
BOTTOM OF THE BOX,
LAY THE DREADED
SKULLS"



enough the strange marks of violence of which my Uncle had spoken in his story of the night before.

They felt slightly startled, but quickly recovering themselves, they proceeded to examine minutely the hideous objects before them, until, feeling convinced that nothing more remained to be seen, they closed the lid, and the box was restored to its original position.

Darrell had just reached this point in his narrative, when we were recalled to things mundane by the sound of the dinner-gong, and, with a hurried assurance from me that I would not mention what I had just heard, we descended with all haste to the dining-room.

Dinner passed off quietly, but I observed that my Uncle studiously avoided questioning Darrell as to the route he and his cousin had chosen for their ride, and even after Mrs. Ranleigh had left the table, no allusion was made to it.

It must have been about nine o'clock when we entered the drawing-room, and our host had just finished showing us some interesting sketches of Rouen, which he had made during his stay there in the summer, when I noticed Darrell approach my Uncle, and, remarking in a low tone that he was going into the conservatory to smoke a cigarette, he left the room.

Not more than twenty minutes could have elapsed before I detected certain signs of commotion about the house, and soon hurried footsteps were heard approaching, and Mrs. Barber, the housekeeper, white, and trembling, appeared at the door, and in a terror-stricken voice gasped out, "Oh, Sir, come at once, Mr. Darrell is dead."

With a stifled cry of horror, we all followed my Uncle upstairs, and there, sure enough, was young Darrell stretched upon the floor, to all appearances perfectly lifeless.

The body was rigid as a corpse, and the jaw so firmly set that all our efforts to force brandy between the clenched teeth were unavailing.

My Uncle, who appeared completely unnerved, shook his head despairingly, and, bending over the prostrate figure, muttered, "What a fulfilment! What a terrible fulfilment!" then, controlling

himself with an effort, he gave directions to the housekeeper as to the means to be employed in endeavouring to restore animation. The body was immediately stripped and wrapped in hot blankets, poultices were placed under the heart, the limbs were chafed, and hot-water bottles applied to the feet; in fact, every remedy that could be suggested was tried, but all in vain; no sign of returning life being discernible.

The gardener, who had been despatched to the nearest village for a doctor, returned in about half-an-hour, bringing the physician with him, and with breathless anxiety we awaited the verdict.

After making a thorough examination, the Doctor pronounced it to be a case of a most unusual kind, and, whilst expressing his conviction that life was not actually extinct, held out little hope of ultimate recovery, declaring that the spark of life which remained was so infinitesimally small, that it might go out at any moment.

All we could do, he said, was to continue the treatment already commenced, and wait patiently for any change that might take place. Promising to return at an early hour the following morning, he departed.

Throughout the whole of that night we continued the chafing of the limbs, and with untiring perseverance applied the poultices and hot-water bottles, but, as the hours dragged slowly by, our task appeared to become more and more hopeless. Never shall I forget the anxiety and suspense of that long vigil; we all watched by the bedside, and it was not until the cold grey light of dawn began to creep through the window blinds, that my poor Uncle could be induced to relinquish his post and take a rest on the sofa, which had been brought into the room for that purpose.

It must have been past seven o'clock, and the candles were beginning to assume a sickly pallor in the morning light, when my attention was suddenly arrested by a slight tremor which ran through the hitherto motionless figure at my side; eagerly bending over the rigid ashen face, I was overjoyed to catch a faint sound of breathing, which had been, up to that point, quite inaudible.

Making a sign to dear old Mrs. Barber, the housekeeper, who was watching at the bedside with me, we once more endeavoured to force brandy between the closed teeth, this time with more success, and gradually signs of returning life became apparent.

It was soon after this that an incident occurred which I cannot help regarding as absolutely providential.

Mrs. Barber, I remember, was leaning over the bed rearranging the pillows, and just as she was gently raising Darrell's head in order to place it in a more comfortable position, she said to me in a half whisper, "If only he could cry, it would relieve the brain." At that moment Darrell's eyes opened, and seeing the kind, motherly face bending over him, it seemed to recall some incident in his early life, connected with a

dear old nurse he had lost, and murmuring faintly, "O Mimi, Mimi, have you come back to me in my trouble," a convulsive fit of sobbing seized him, which lasted for some minutes, and was terribly painful to witness. This was followed by such utter prostration, that we again feared that the spark of life was, after all, to be extinguished.

Such, however, was not the case, and when the Doctor arrived, he said that a crisis had been reached, and with great care Darrell might possibly pull through.

The morning passed, bringing little change in the patient's condition, and it was not until about four o'clock in the afternoon that Darrell showed further signs of returning consciousness, and his eyes unclosed.

For some moments he gazed round upon us, wonderingly, then, as if an



"LYING ACROSS HIS BED APPARENTLY DEAD"

idea suddenly flashed across him, he said in an anxious whisper, "Where is Dick? I want to see Dick."

My Uncle, realizing the importance of gratifying the slightest wish of the sick man, begged Dickson to ride over at once to Sheel, and bring back young Bravington with as little delay as possible, and we awaited their return with some impatience, as Darrell appeared to become more and more restless.

And now comes the curious part of my story. After an absence of about an hour and a half, Dickson returned alone, bringing the news that he had found the Rectory household in a state of the greatest agitation and alarm, young Bravington having been found in the morning, by the servant who went to call him, lying across his bed apparently dead, and only towards the after-

noon had he shown signs of returning life. The Doctor, who had been called in, stated that he was in a most critical condition, and at the present moment, he lay hovering between life and death.

Thus was the strange prophecy in both cases fulfilled, and it only remains for me to add that the two young men, who, in so remarkable a manner "passed through the Valley of the Shadow of Death," are even now suffering from the effects of their extraordinary experience, although more than a month has elapsed since the events above narrated took place.

The facts of this story, I beg to remind my readers, are absolutely and entirely true in every detail. As to the explanation, I must leave that to others; I confess it completely baffles me.



THE CARLYLE OF ART.

AN APPRECIATION OF S. H. SIME.

BY WALTER C. PURCELL.

THERE are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy, and it is exactly the things of which the philosophers never dream that Mr. Sime delights to picture. If an artist choose to picture Richard the Third on Bosworth Field, there is no reason why another artist should not picture the witches in "Macbeth." If the mountain and the meadow, the hills and the streams, which, in Ruskin's picturesque phrase, fill the hills with wind-ing light, find a thousand portrayers, why should not the nightmares with which every well-fed Briton is infected not find an artist of their own? Mr. Sime is the artist of nightmares, and, art being all-comprehensive, who can say that he does not fill his appointed place in the artistic economy of things? When Mr. Sime pictures a mermaid, as is portrayed in our illustration, he does not give us the mermaid of tradition, a soft, alluring, voluptuous entity, but an all-devouring monster of the crocodile species, the mermaid that one might expect to see in his dreams.

Mr. Sime's weird grotesques have appeared in the pages of "The Sketch," "The Favorite," "The Idler," and "Pick-me-Up," whilst the illustrations which he did for the latter paper for Mr. Arnold Golsworthy's weekly theatrical article—signed "Jingle"—attracted a good deal of attention. The inimitably light, dainty humour of Mr. Golsworthy attracted Sime, and they have done a good deal of work together. In fact, they have derived inspiration from each other, and an instance of this came under my notice recently. The proprietor of

a popular monthly told me the artist sent him a drawing of "The Mermaid," and the same evening he showed it to Mr. Arnold Golsworthy, and asked him if he would write a few verses to accompany it. With a facility born of genius, Mr. Golsworthy immediately wrote the following powerful verses:—

O thou mariner, riding acrest of the swell
Of the glittering spray-spattered sea,
Take thou heed of the bubbles and spumings
that tell
Of the Hag of the Ocean—the Mermaid of
Hell—
That is lying in wait there for thee!

When the moon is smudged out, and the night
chaos-dark,
And the waves surging angry and high,
She is more to be feared than the ravenous
shark,
As she lashes along in the trail of the barque
With her hideous, spluttering cry.

Though the men at the wheel fiercely strain eye
and ear,
Yet their striving shall never avail;
For the Hag in the deep, with a maddening leer,
Writhes alongside the rudder, the doomed ship
to steer
On the rocks in the path of the gale.

Comes the word, that the Mermaid has fastened
her grip
On them all—and despair stamps each face;
And they know that there's never a hope for
the ship,
As each turns up his eyes with a prayer on his
lip,
Or a groaning and shrieking for grace.

Still the Hag of the Sea to the rudder below
Grimly hangs, as a cumbering clod,
Till the rocks smite the vessel a murderous
blow,
And the din rises over their mad screams of
woe
Like the roar of a merciless god.



The Mermaid.
Drawn by S. H. Sims.

Wide her gills will dilate at the sound of the thud,

As she belches forth bubbles of glee,
At the thought of her feast 'mong the weeds
and the mud;

For her meat is man's flesh, and her drink is his blood—

And they call her the Ghoul of the Sea!

Mr. Sime is, if you like, a fantastic artist, but in all his fantasy there is a moral, and in his every line there is a thought. Take, as an example, the picture which we give of "The Felon Flower;" did ever before black and white drawing depict the weirdness, the sadness, and one might say the picturesqueness of the plunge into doom with the hope and the certain promise of the hereafter that this drawing of Mr. Sime's insinuates? He is fond of a dark background, though he can, on special occasions, dispense with it, as he has done so effectively in the drawing which we reproduce of Emil Sauer, and which those who have had the pleasure of seeing, not to speak of listening to, that eminent



"Where's the war?"



Old Lady, *loc.*: "What are those idiotic people making all that fuss about?"

pianist, will recognise as being more true to life and more full of life than any photograph could possibly be. Notwithstanding all the strides the photographic art has made, it has come to be recognised that in depicting, for instance, a battle scene, it lags far behind the lively pen of the artist. We do not know whether Mr. Sime has ever taken a photograph, or what is his opinion of photography in general, but, judging by the inwardness of things, we should say that he could scent a photographer's shop round the corner, and that he would cross over the street to avoid it.

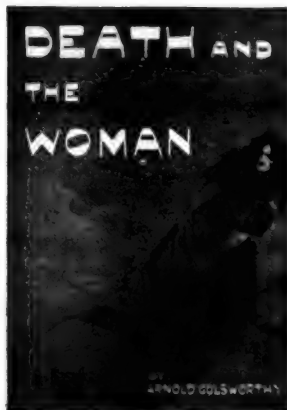
The writer of this article has never had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Sime, but he has in his possession what is considered an excellent photograph of the artist, and he is struck by the strange resemblance between his face and that of another eccentric genius whose name for half a century was in everybody's mouth.

Mr. S. H. Sime has the face of Thomas Carlyle, and the resemblance is not casual, for, to give him his real description, Sime is the Carlyle of art.



He has got the same overbearing forehead, the same deep-set eyes—which can look into futurity—the mouth half mobile, with a strong chin to VOL. X, NEW SERIES.—AUGUST, 1900.

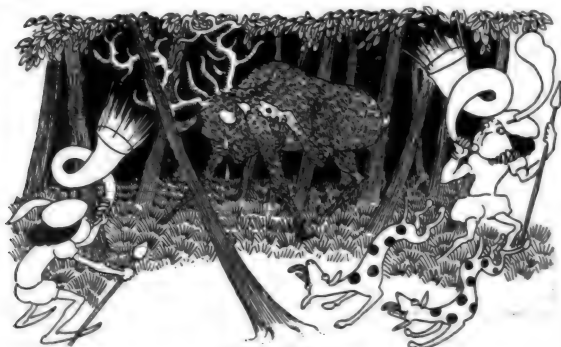
back it up. Had Mr. Sime lived in Carlyle's time and been a resident of Cheyne Row, one could fancy with what delight the old philosopher would have received



A Book Cover.

Mr. Sime's incarnation of his lurid description of what one might call "the indescribable scenes of the French Re-

volution." Carlyle was as eccentric in his use of the English letters as Mr. Sime is in the use of English lines, and when history comes to be written it will probably be found that the author of "Sartor Resartus" is less known to fame than the drawer of "The Mermaid." Some twenty years ago every sixth standard boy, although he could not quote a line of Carlyle's, used to swear by the Chelsea sage, and sneer at Ruskin, because Ruskin always acknowledged (the better word would be pretended) that Carlyle was his master, and now everybody reads Ruskin and Carlyle is—dead. We do not wish to say that Mr. Sime's art will be as transitory as Mr. Carlyle's prose—but one may say that in fifty years hence the artist who has been able to describe the utmost limits of the grotesque will be more studied than the artist in words who tried to change the English language and failed. When it comes to the merely grotesque and what one might call unmeaningness, there is no modern artist that can show what unmeaningness is like Mr. Sime. And yet when one looks at the accompanying drawing of the stag—a bulk, a hump, and all the rest, one



The Stag—His Lament.

These forest shades my spirit chafe—
I hear the hunters' horns,

I wish I knew a certain, safe
And speedy cure for corns



The Falcon Flower.
Drawn by S. H. Sims.



Sal.

begins to believe that Mr. Sime had some notion in his head over and above the mere idea of decorating the entrance hall of a menagerie.

It has been our pleasure in this country, although we have led the way for fifty years or more in the black and white art, that our caricatures have always been good-natured, and instead of emphasising the bad points of a political opponent, we have delighted to show up his good qualities. For instance, which particular Tory in England would have his dreams disturbed by the caricatures of Carruthers Gould in "The Westminster Gazette?" Mr. Sime has often gone into the domain of caricature, and has not only shown himself a master in technique, but a master in conception. The accompanying drawing, which represents Mr. Beerbohm Tree lecturing, is a good example of Mr. Sime's work in his exuberant mood. Mr. Tree has too many hands, and when one looks at it, in the first instance, it seems like a puzzle, but if you take in the contour of the whole figure, and look at the pose of the real hands, the picture is as full of life and nerve as the coils of a cobra.

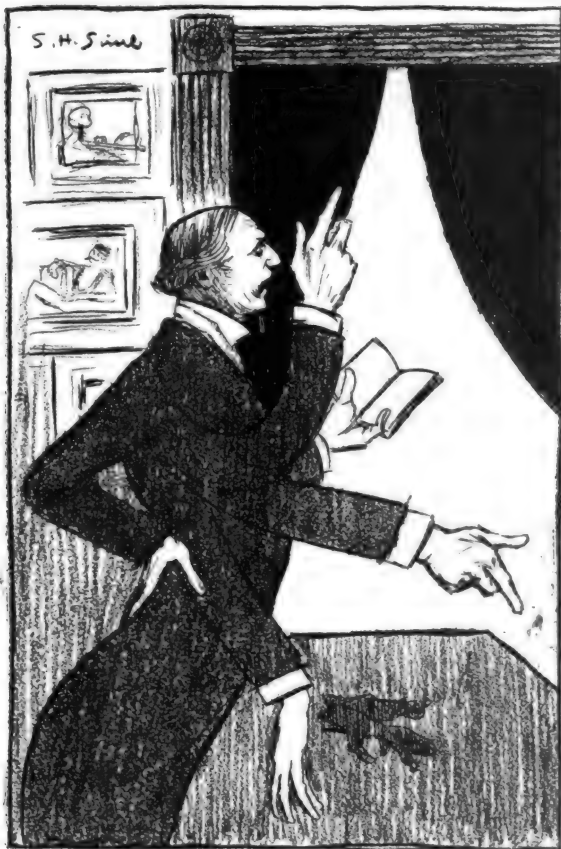
Mr. Sime has himself said that "caricature is in the nature of a sarcastic remark," and he argues that it is never a portrait, but a comment.

As regards the personal matter, Mr. Sime has had a unique experience. Instead of being ashamed, he is proud of the fact that, as a boy, he worked in a colliery, with all the dust and the thousand inconveniences appertaining to the life. He afterwards worked for a linendraper, looking after the things which hung outside the shop. Then came a brief experience with a barber; he did the shaving and young Sime the lathering. After that the artist went in for signwriting, and did so well with it that he started on his own account, and so found sufficient time and energy to join the Liverpool School of Art. After winning a South Kensington Medal, he came up to London, and worked for the halfpenny comic papers, and what he considers was his first drawing was accepted by Raven-Hill for "Pick-me-Up." It seems the irony of commonplace things that the



What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals.

Shakespeare.



Mr. H. Beerbohm Tree lecturing.

man who in Yorkshire worked for five years in a coal mine should be editor of what is acknowledged to be one of the best artistic and literary magazines in London.

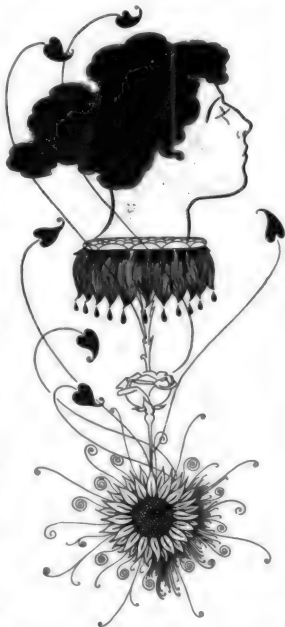
For the moment Mr. Sime's ambition seems to be centred in the well-known monthly "The Idler," of which he is the proprietor, art editor, literary editor, and business manager in one. The magazine is pervaded entirely and utterly by his personality, and if it were only for the many examples of his own peculiar art which each number brings, it must have a fascination for no inconsiderable number of the literary and artistic public.

Like many of his compeers, Mr. Sime is a more prominent figure in Bohemia than in the outside world. A year or two ago, I noticed that the artistic work of Miss M. S. Pickett appeared to be influenced by Sime's art, and her quaint and fantastic drawings attracted my attention. When I learnt that Mr. Sime had married this lady, it seemed to me to be the natural sequence of things. Mr. Sime and his wife live in a flat—like so many other people who are engaged in one or other of the arts—situated in

Great Ormond Street, but their real home is on their Scottish estate of Aberfoyle. Mr. Sime is a member of the Langham Sketching Club, and he joined the Society of British Artists at the same time as Mr. Eckhardt and the late Mr. Manuel. His London headquarters are

the Yorick Club, where he may be often found after dinner, discussing in a quiet, but very argumentative voice the topics of the day. A friend of his has told me Sime is inclined to be reticent concerning himself, but ever ready to discuss writers—from Montaigne to Meredith. "I verily believe," he added, "that after half an hour's conversation with him, assuming you were ignorant of his name or his work, you would go away with the impression that you had talked with a man of leisure and a philosopher." He was indicating that Sime's conversation is far removed from what is known as "shoppy," and that he never talks of himself except in reply to a direct question, and has an utter detestation of anything which savours of pretension or cant, and in

saying this I find I have paid an unintentional, though well-deserved compliment to Sime in calling him the Carlyle of Art.





BURIED ALIVE: A SKETCH.

BY S. BARING GOULD.

AMONG the ghastly pictures in the Wiertz Gallery at Brussels there is not one that sends so cold a shiver through the marrow of the visitor as that of the man who, in time of cholera, has been buried alive. The vision of Napoleon is horrible, the mad woman devouring her children is revolting, three minutes after death is imaginative and wild, but that horrible scene in the vault when the buried man tears open his coffin, scattering the rats, and glares out at the spectator from under the riven lid, is of surpassing, unspeakable horror;—and it is a horror that chills the heart, in the thought that even so it may happen to him.

Fortunately we, in England, are not so liable to be buried alive as are those in countries where an interment takes place on the day after death, and the dread of it is so great that, in our own country, a burial rarely takes place till tokens of decomposition have set in. It was not always so, and it is not so now on the Continent. Considering how little we know of the duration of time in which suspended animation may continue in epilepsy, when death is so clearly simulated as to be easily mistaken for death, it were well if interments were never permitted till there are evident tokens of change in the condition of the body.

The writer perhaps feels more strongly on this point than many owing to his having had brought to his notice three cases, of which two ended in burial where there exists great doubt whether death had really taken place, whereas the third was one of rescue at the last moment. This last was the case of a lady in the West Indies, who apparently died through the shock of the house being struck by lightning. She was laid out as dead, and placed in her coffin, but,

though motionless and pulseless, was in perfect possession of her faculties, and knew what was being done for her, heard what was spoken about her, was well aware what was in store for her. Previous to the closing of the coffin, whilst her father stood beside her, taking the last look, conscious that this was a supreme moment, by an effort of the will she strove to open her eyes, and succeeded so far as to raise one lid. Her father saw the movement and stopped the funeral. A surgeon was sent for, she was bled, and as the blood flowed, recovered flexibility. Ever after she had a start in that eye of which she had succeeded in flickering the lid.

Tertullian, in his treatise on the soul, written about A.D. 200, mentions the case of a relation who—there can be little question—was buried alive in the Catacombs. He says, "I know about a woman, the daughter of Christian parents, who fell asleep peacefully in the very flower of her age and beauty, after a singularly happy, though brief married life. Before they laid her in the grave, and when the priest began the appointed office, at the very first breath of his prayer, she raised her hands from her side, and folded them in the attitude of devotion, and after the holy service was concluded let them fall back into their lateral position." He goes on to tell how in a certain cemetery "there is a well-known story among our own people," about a corpse that when the tomb was opened was found to have moved to one side, and Tertullian concludes that it had removed to give place to the body that was to be laid beside it. To us it seems more likely that the supposed dead had revived in the tomb, and moved aside in a struggle for breath, and then had died of suffocation.

Tertullian speaks of such stories being

not uncommon, and he accounts for them in an odd way, by supposing that some "lingering remnants of the soul" abide with the corpse for a while, and are only slowly withdrawn from it.

The other two instances to which the writer has referred as coming more or less under his notice were these. A naval officer dined with an aged friend one evening, and fell dead on his way back to his lodgings after dinner. He had no relatives in the place, where he was only staying for a fortnight. He remained for several days, the body flexible, and without manifesting any change. He was finally buried, but the writer believes that his friend was never after easy in his mind about this case, doubtful whether the man were really dead, and believing that he ought to have interfered and insisted on the funeral being delayed.

The third case was very similar, in the South of France.

Can there be much doubt that St. Andrew Avellius was buried alive? He died, or at all events his pulse stopped, on November 10th, 1608. He was at once conveyed to the Church of the Theatines in Naples, and laid out there. Crowds came to see him, and he remained unburied for an unusual number of days. His cheeks did not lose their colour, nor did his limbs lose their flexibility; his eyelids were lifted, and his eyes appeared as bright and full of expression as when he was alive. Moreover, blood continued to exude from some sores he had on his head and body. Nevertheless he was buried.

A most painful instance of burial alive occurs in the last October volume of the *Bollandists*. The supposed dead man, whilst being carried to burial, made a desperate effort, and moved his head. This was greeted with exclamations of "A miracle! a miracle!" and went some way towards establishing the unfortunate wretch's claim to canonisation. Perhaps the best known instance of burial alive is that of Zeno, Emperor of the East, who died on the night of April 29, 491. His end is variously related, and a certain amount of mystery hangs about it. The story of his burial alive does not rest on contemporary authorities. It is

to this effect. He was subject to epileptic fits, and during a banquet on the night in question, fell from the table in one of these. His chamberlains undressed him, and believing him to be dead laid him on a plank. At daybreak a shroud was thrown over him, and the Empress Ariadne hurried on the funeral. That same day he was laid in a tomb closed with a slab of marble. Ariadne placed guards in the church, and imposed on them strict orders, under pain of death, to allow no one to approach, and on no account to open the tomb. They obeyed, and in spite of the lamentable cries of Zeno, which they heard after the lapse of some hours, and which continued for some time, they made no effort to release him. Only after the lapse of a fortnight was the tomb opened, when the unhappy Emperor was found dead, seated—and he had torn the flesh off his arms with his teeth. No sooner was Zeno put out of the way than Ariadne called Anastasius to assume the purple, and married him forty days after the burial of Zeno.

Hamadāni, an Arab poet, fell, struck with apoplexy in 1007. As he was supposed to be dead, he was buried, but revived in the tomb. His screams were heard, and the vault opened. He was drawn forth alive, but the agony and horror he had undergone had so shaken him that he did not long survive his restoration. Duns Scotus, the subtle doctor, as he was termed, is also said to have been buried alive. He died in 1308, and when, some time after his death, his sarcophagus was opened, the body was discovered turned over, and in such a condition that little doubt was entertained that he had been buried in a state of lethargy, which had been mistaken for death. In a curious and scarce book published at Frankfurt in 1798, a writer, who calls himself only "H. v. E.," appeals against too hasty burials, and quotes instances to show that in Germany in many cases interments were hurried on before death was established. He mentions an instance of a lady of noble rank who died in childbirth, and was at once consigned to the family mausoleum. The husband died shortly after, and when the family

vault was opened, the woman was seen, seated on her coffin, which she had torn open and from which she had escaped. She was dead, supported by the angle of the wall against which she had sunk, as in darkness and despair she had seated herself on the coffin from which she had succeeded in releasing herself. Another instance mentioned by the same writer is that of a student of the University of Ingolstadt, who apparently died and was laid out. Two old women were commissioned to remain with the body all night, and they saw nothing to make them suppose he was not dead. Next morning he was placed in a coffin and fastened down "with wooden pegs," and the body was taken to the courtyard of the house in which the student lodged. Just as the funeral procession was about to start, the young man heaved up the lid of the coffin, and thrust forth his hands bound together by the old women with a rosary. He declared that he had been conscious the whole time whilst prepared for burial.

In "The Hanover Magazine" for 1791, the Clerk of the Royal Palace, named Wuth, gave an account of his own experiences. He says, "When I was a lad I had a serious illness. I was given plenty of medicine, but got no better. Presently I fell into a condition of body so rigid and pulseless that my parents believed I was dead. Nevertheless I retained entire consciousness, and both saw what went on around me, and also heard all that was said. I heard my mother and sisters crying, and heard them discuss the summoning of a certain woman to lay me out. One of my sisters was ordered to fetch her, whereupon the eldest objected that the woman was a witch. Her objection was overruled, and my youngest sister went in quest of her. To this day I can see, whenever I recur to that momentous time, the figure of the stout, broad-shouldered Katherine, and recall how she put on a pretence of crying along with the rest. I saw my father prepare the board on which I was to be laid, when removed from my bed, by covering it with straw—that is to say I saw him pass me carrying the straw. Presently

old Katherine put her fingers on my eyelids and closed them. I was washed and prepared for burial. I never for one instant lost complete consciousness, and till the old woman closed my eyes I could see whatever passed within their range. I felt no pain whatever; and as I somehow did not realise what was in preparation for me—burial alive, I felt no alarm and uneasiness."

Unfortunately Herr Wuth does not say how he came round and his burial was prevented.

Cardinal d'Espinoza, Prime Minister to Philip II., died, as it was supposed, after a short illness. His rank entitled him to be embalmed. Accordingly the body was opened for that purpose, and lungs and heart were exposed. At that moment the blood began to flow, the Cardinal awoke, as from a trance, and had sufficient strength to arrest the hand that held the knife of the anatomist.

On the 23rd September, 1763, the Abbé Prévost, author of the famous novel, "*Manon de l'Escaut*," had a fit in the forest of Chantilly. The body was conveyed to the nearest parsonage. He was supposed to have died of apoplexy. But the local authorities, desiring to be satisfied as to the occasion of his death, ordered a post-mortem examination. During the process, the poor Abbé uttered a cry of agony—it was too late, the surgeon's knife had touched a vital point.

The following rests on the authority of Dr. Schmidt, a physician attached to the hospital at Paderborn, where it occurred in 1835.

A young man of the name of Caspar Kreute, of Berne, died in one of the wards of the hospital, but his body could not be interred for three weeks, for this reason:—During the first twenty-four hours after drawing his last breath, the corpse more than once re-opened the eyes, after they had been closed, and at intervals the pulse could be felt feebly beating. On the third and fourth day, portions of the skin, which had been burnt to test the reality of his death, suppurated. On the fifth day the corpse altered the position of one hand. On the ninth day a vesicular eruption appeared

on the back. For nine days the forehead was contracted, giving the face an expression of frowning. The lips remained red till the eighteenth day; and the joints preserved their flexibility from first to last. He lay in this condition in a warm room for nineteen days, without any alteration than a wasting of the flesh. Till after the nineteenth day no discoloration, no odour of decomposition was observed. Kreute had been cured of ague, and had laboured under a slight affection of the chest, but no adequate reason for his death could be found. We can hardly doubt that with proper restoratives the unfortunate young man might have been brought round.

In 1680, at Dresden, when the plague was raging, a woman, named Elizabeth Krembaum, the wife of a bookbinder, was thrown as dead into a plague pit along with twenty-five corpses, but revived as the earth was being thrown in on her, shrieked out, held up her hands, and was drawn forth. She survived her partial interment thirty-nine years. In 1634, a poor piper, named John Bartendale, was convicted of felony at the York Assizes, and condemned to be hung. The sentence was carried out on March 27th outside Micklegate Bar, York. After he had remained swinging for three-quarters of an hour, he was cut down, and buried near the place of execution. The officers of justice had accomplished their work carelessly in both particulars, as it afterwards transpired, for he had been neither properly hung nor properly buried.

The same day, in the afternoon, a gentleman, one of the Vavasours, of Hazlewood, was riding by, when he observed the earth moving in a certain place. He ordered his servant to alight; he himself descended from his horse; and together they threw off the mould, and discovered the piper alive. Mr. Vavasour and his servant helped him out of his grave, and the poor wretch was removed again to York Castle. He was again tried at the following Assizes. It was a nice point at law whether the man could be sentenced to execution again; intercession was made on his behalf, and a full and free pardon granted him.

Drunken Barnaby in his "Book of Travels" alludes to Bartendale, at York:

"Here a piper apprehended,
Was found guilty and suspended;

What did happen is no fiction,
For cut down and quick interred,
Earth rejected what was buried;
Half alive or dead he rises,
Got a pardon next assizes,
And in York continued blowing—
Yet a sense of goodness showing."

Perhaps the most curious case is that of Francois de Cville, who wrote an account of his own adventures. He was wounded by an arquebus in the siege of Rouen in 1562, whilst ascending the wall, and fell back into the moat, where he lay unconscious. When the dead were buried after the engagement, he had earth thrown over him and some other corpses that lay near. His valet, hearing where he had fallen, came in quest of him, to recover his body and give it more respectable burial, and took with him an officer of the guards. They dug up together two or three bodies that had been partially interred, but they were so covered with mud that they were not recognisable, and they reburied them. The servant and the officer were leaving, when the former said that one of the corpses was not completely covered, as the hand was out. They went back, and were in the act of heaping earth over the hand, when the moon shone out and sparkled in a diamond on one of the fingers. The guard stooped to recover the ring, when the valet exclaimed that it was that of his master. The body was now disinterred again, and removed to the Huguenot camp, where the surgeons scouted the idea that it had life in it. The faithful servant, undeterred, conveyed it to a house where it remained for five days and nights without token of consciousness, but with fever replacing the icy coldness that had possessed it in the fosse. Before he was recovered, he was flung out of the window by some soldiers of the enemy, but fell on a dunghill, where he lay for three days and nights. Finally he recovered, and on

the expulsion of the Protestants from France, retired in 1585 to England. He wrote his own life in 1606, when aged seventy, forty-four years after his double burial. There is a horrible book entitled "*De Miraculis Mortuorum*," published at the beginning of last century, that narrates a series of tales concerning discoveries made in graves, discoveries that pointed to a continued low state of vegetative existence after the soul had left the body—stories of their nibbling at their shrouds, snacking their lips, turning over in their coffins, retaining their colour, opening their eyes, uttering exclamations, and the like. Almost certainly the stories of the Vampyres prevalent in many countries are due to interment before death has really set in.

In 1732 a commission was appointed to enquire into the condition of affairs in some villages in Servia, where the people were in a condition of panic in the belief that the dead revisited their homes and sucked the blood of their relatives. The Commissioners dug up a number of those who had been recently interred, and found many of them not only incorrupt, but with joints flexible, colour in their cheeks, and the eyes still fresh. They drove stakes through all such, though some groaned and cried out when so treated. The whole account, which is infinitely horrible, is printed in Horst's "*Zauberbibliothek*" (1821). The Commissioners, who had received orders from Vienna to act, were quite unable to account for the phenomena, and it never

for a moment occurred to their minds that the case was one of a widespread cataleptic or epileptic epidemic having come on the Servian peasantry, and that these bodies were not really dead. The fresh air revived them, and when they showed signs of restored animation they were at once condemned as Vampyres and a stake driven through them. The Commissioners acted under Prince Alexander of Würtemberg, who was Stadtholder of Servia at the time for the Emperor Charles VI.

The following sad circumstance occurred in November, 1891, in Montauban.

"A young married lady, Madame Joffis, who lived at Mirabel, near Montauban, had a cataleptic seizure when in child-bed two days ago, and there was no sign of returning animation, which indeed was not expected, as the lady's friends all believed her dead. The funeral was arranged, and carried out, and the mourners returned to the house. Shortly afterwards the undertaker casually remarked that when the corpse was put into the coffin he noticed that the bed was slightly warm where the body had lain. On hearing this the husband instantly went to the burial ground and had the coffin taken from the grave and opened. To his horror he then found the body turned over, the shroud torn, and the fingers of one hand bleeding, as if from a desperate attempt to remove the coffin lid. But it was too late; his wife, who was undoubtedly alive when buried, had since been suffocated."





THE Vesper bell was ringing, and from the convent a long line of silent, white-robed Sisters were wending their way through the cloisters to the Abbey Church, to take their places in the choir. The organ pealed forth its solemn tones, a few worshippers from the farms around straggled in. The service began, but the Lady Abbess was for once absent from her stall.

She sat in the convent parlour, in close conversation with the Lord Bishop of Wartenheim, patron and benefactor of the Abbey, and renowned through the Fatherland for his warlike and irascible disposition.

The Lady Abbess was old and ugly, but never did she look older or uglier than on this particular afternoon, as she sat in the full glare of the setting sun.

"She is a saucy jade!" she hissed through her clenched teeth, "and were it not for her large fortune, I would quickly drive her from the convent walls."

"But thou wilt soon reduce her to obedience when she has taken the veil," returned the Bishop, slyly, "and that she must be forced to do with all speed. It were a thousand pities, Mother, to let this money slip through

our hands, and surely thou wilt not let thyself be baffled by a mere girl!"

"She will never take the veil, of that I feel certain," snapped the Abbess.

"She must, and shall!" cried the Bishop, wrathfully banging his fist on the table until the window panes rattled again. "I will see her grandfather the Burgomaster, without delay; and put it to him that Elizabeth, being an orphan, and possessing great wealth, is likely at any moment to become the prey of a fortune-hunter. Indeed I shrewdly suspect that she has already engaged herself to that penniless young adventuring knight, Wolfgang Von Hartstein!"

"Ha! I did not know of this," interrupted the Abbess with a frown.

"I am almost sure of it," continued the Bishop, "and I will further say to the Burgomaster that for the salvation of Elizabeth's soul it would be as well for her to take the vows in this convent, while her fortune could not be in safer keeping than in that of Mother Church!"

"I trust thou mayst succeed," said the reverend lady sourly. "But Elizabeth is not easy to manage, the minx!"

"Well, well, let us hope she will soon change for the better!" replied the Bishop hastily, in order to avoid another

outburst; "and now for my second mission to Wartenheim."

He hitched his chair nearer to that of the Abbess, and looked round over his shoulder to see that the door was closed.

"The Priory Church contains a relic of Saint Boniface," he remarked in a whisper.

The Lady Abbess said nothing, but she fixed her eyes on him attentively, and leaned forward to hear better.

"Now, why should the Priory possess that sacred relic?" said the Bishop, "when by rights it should belong to the more important church, the Abbey; in other words, Mother, the relic ought to be here."

He paused, but the Abbess still said nothing; she was watching him eagerly.

"Think of the enormous difference it would make to us," cried the prelate, "think of the pilgrims that would flock to the shrine; of the offerings they would leave, and the consequent increase in our revenues. Why, Mother, the benefits are incalculable!"

"We must have it," said the Abbess in a low, concentrated tone. "But how dost thou propose to gain access to the shrine, since it is guarded day and night by a monk secreted in the watching-chamber?"

The Bishop crossed his legs with a complacent smile.

"I have thought of that," he replied, "and devised a plan which must succeed.

After I have seen our worthy friend the Burgomaster, I shall proceed to the reverend Prior, Father Gregory, and make known to him my intention of keeping a vigil to-morrow from midnight to dawn before the relic in the Priory Church. Now, as thou doubtless knowest, Mother, it is not etiquette for anyone to be on guard while the Bishop



"I trust thou mayst succeed," said the reverend lady sourly.

keeps his watch there, so that I shall be able to make good use of my opportunity."

"Tis a bold scheme and worthy of success," said the Abbess, rising as she spoke. "But thou must be an hungered, my lord Bishop, after thy ride hither. Will it please thee to accompany me to the Refectory, where I have caused a meal to be spread for thee?"

"With pleasure, reverend Mother," replied his lordship of Wartenheim, following her nothing loath, "for since thou dost mention it, I feel within me an

The pair had scarcely quitted the parlour, when the door of a large linen press which stood in one corner opened cautiously, and a young girl stepped out noiselessly. She was small and slender, with quantities of flaxen hair, and a pair of very pretty blue eyes, which at the present moment were shining with anger.

"So!" she muttered, stamping her foot. "Ye couple of holy hypocrites! I and my fortune are to be sacrificed to the selfish greed of that sour-faced old Abbess and her grasping colleague! They think to force me to take the veil, do they? Well, I will outwit them both. The Prior shall hear of this ere another hour has passed, and then we shall see who will get the sacred relic. But how to get out of the convent? 'Twill be no easy task, and I must exercise my ingenuity — Ha! I have it."

Elizabeth gave vent to a little laugh, as a brilliant idea crossed her mind, and,

running from the room, she gained the convent gate. The plump and rosy-faced old portress was indulging in a little nap, and when Elizabeth aroused her, started up bewildered.



She poured into her lover's willing ear the whole of the conversation.

empty void that would seem to demand a fat capon or a round of beef to satisfy its cravings, with a draught of rich red wine to bear me up for the coming contest."

"Quick, Sister, quick!" cried the girl, "the Lady Abbess needs thee, and has bidden me take thy place whilst thou art gone. Run, run, Sister, it is of vital importance. Here, give me thy keys, lest anyone should come."

The portress, still dazed with sleep, hastily detached the bunch of keys that hung at her girdle, and then hurried towards the convent. Left alone, Elizabeth proceeded to try which key fitted the gate, and happening by a lucky chance to hit upon the right one first, quickly let herself out into the road, and ran with all speed towards the town. The sun had by this time sunk below the horizon, so that there was little likelihood of her being seen; indeed, she met no one until she had nearly reached the end of the high road, when suddenly the sound of a horse's hoofs behind her made her start aside in an agony of fear.

"Elizabeth! Can this be possible!" exclaimed a familiar voice.

With a cry of joy she ran towards the horseman.

"Wolfgang! Is it thou? Ah! I feared 'twas that hateful Abbess!"

"It would seem that thou hast escaped from the dame's clutches," laughed the knight, as he dismounted and kissed his ladye-love. "But this high road is no place for thee at this hour, Elizabeth, and it is lucky that I happened to spy thee, thou little witch!"

"I have good reason for being here, Wolfgang," replied the girl breathlessly. "A plot so dastardly has been hatched by the Abbess and the Bishop of Warthenheim, that it will fairly startle thee with its audacity. Listen, and tell me if thou hast ever heard the like."

Panting with indignation, she poured into her lover's willing ear the whole of the conversation she had overheard in the convent parlour. He looked very grave as she finished, and agreed with her that the best thing to be done was to seek the Prior without delay.

Accordingly he threw his horse's reins over his arm, and, with Elizabeth by his side, took the way towards the Priory. It was about two miles distant from the Abbey, situated on the river bank at the

other end of the town, and standing in the midst of rich meadow lands and cornfields.

The lovers walked quickly, skirting the edge of the town to avoid meeting anyone, and in an incredibly short time the walls of the Priory loomed before them in the dusk.

They reached the gate, and mounting the steps, rang loudly, the tones of the bell echoing with startling effect through the quiet cloisters. There was a long pause, then the pattering of bare feet was heard on the stone flags, the portal was flung wide, and a monk, holding a lantern high above his head, demanded in accents of surprise:

"Who rings at this hour, and so imperatively?"

"Danger threatens the holy relic," cried Wolfgang, baring his head. "I pray thee, Father, give us entrance, for we bear ill news."

The monk hesitated on seeing Elizabeth, but Wolfgang did not wait for a refusal, leading in first his sweetheart, then his charger, tethering the latter close to the gate. Then he bade the monk lead them to the Prior.

"The brethren are at their evening meal," observed the religious, as he ushered the visitors into the small bare guest room. "If ye will wait here, I will apprise the Prior of your coming!"

He departed in the direction of the refectory, but Elizabeth had no intention of being left behind, and promptly followed, in spite of her lover's remonstrances, bidding him come too if he feared to stay there alone. Wolfgang shrugged his shoulders, and stifling a laugh, accompanied her down the long stone corridor. The monk was trotting ahead, quite unconscious of their proximity, and, reaching the refectory door, he pushed it opened and entered, followed by the lovers.

They found themselves in a lofty, oak-roofed hall, on either side of which ran long tables and benches, filled with silent monks eating with downcast eyes, while the Prior and chapter occupied a separate table on a raised dais at the upper end. One of the brothers was

reading aloud from some book of devotion, the monotonous tones of his voice reminding Elizabeth vaguely of a bee humming drowsily among the flowers on a hot summer's day.

The monk who had admitted them, advanced to the high table, and began to inform the Prior of the arrival of the two young people, when, to his terror, his superior arose, and, pointing beyond him, cried with a frown:

"Why hast thou brought this girl hither? 'Tis against all our rules, as thou well knowest!"

The unfortunate brother turned round aghast, and stared at Elizabeth in

speechless horror, but she took no notice of him, and, rushing forward, flung herself on her knees beside the Prior.

"Forgive me, Father, but I could not wait," she entreated, kissing his hand humbly. "Dost thou not remember me? I am the daughter of thine old friend, Adelbert Von Neudeck, and I and Wolfgang are come on a mission of the gravest import."

"Aye, of course, I recollect thee now, little Elizabeth," replied the Prior. "Thy face recalls thy poor father, but who is this Wolfgang?"

Elizabeth glanced round shyly at her lover, and coloured a little.

"Oh! Father, Wolfgang—that is—I mean the Count Von Hartstein, he is—I—"

"I understand," said the Prior gravely, with a twinkle in his shrewd grey eyes, "but your mission, children. I would know what brings you hither? Come with me to my study, and there ye can speak undisturbed."

He rose, and, leading the way through the hall, past the lines of wondering monks, he conducted his guests into a room overlooking the river.

He seated himself in a great, carved, high-backed chair, and signing to the couple to approach, waited for them to speak.

"It hath come to our ears, Father," began the knight, "that the Lord Bishop of Wartenheim has it in his mind to seize the precious relic from the shrine of St. Boniface."

The Prior started.

"Can this be true?" he ejaculated.

"Aye, 'tis true enough, Father," broke in Elizabeth, "for I overheard him discussing his plan with



Something icy cold and heavy as lead closed upon his wrist.

Mother Veronica, the Abbess of St. Mary's."

"To-morrow he will visit thy Priory," continued Wolfgang, "and announce his intention of keeping a vigil in the church between the hours of midnight and dawn. He then, knowing well that all watchers must leave the church as he enters it, will profit by the occasion to possess himself of the holy relic."

The Prior sprang to his feet with a cry of anger.

"Ah! the traitor, he would take us at a disadvantage; we shall be forced to leave our sacred treasure unguarded and will lose it beyond all hope of recovery. By the holy saints, if I dared I would close our doors against this marauding prelate, but, alas! he is too strong, and were I to act thus, he would pour upon us such an army as would raze our well-beloved Priory to the ground."

He paused, overcome with emotion, and hid his face in his hands. The young people stood by in silence, not venturing to speak, until Wolfgang, plucking up courage, touched the old man gently on the arm.

"Father," he said softly, "lend me thine ear a moment, for I think I have a plan by which this wicked plot may be defeated, and the relic saved!"

The Prior raised his head, and a gleam of hope shot into his eyes.

"What is thy plan, my son? Let me hear it, perchance it may help us."

The knight approached, and, bending down, spoke at some length in a low tone, the Prior listening meanwhile with growing satisfaction.

Elizabeth, who had also drawn near, put in a word now and then with a gleeful laugh, ending by dancing joyously round the room.

"Thou hast thought well, my son," said the Prior as Wolfgang concluded, "and if we succeed, thou shalt not go unrewarded. But now, children, ye must depart, for it grows late. Elizabeth, what will the Abbess say when she discovers thy departure?"

"I care not what she says," answered the girl with a pout, "I shall not return there."

"Then thou must go to thy grandfather," said Wolfgang firmly.

"Never!" cried Elizabeth, "he would but send me back to the convent. Nay, look not so shocked, dear Wolfgang; thou shalt take me to my old nurse, who lives hard by with her husband and children. They will shelter me for a day or two at least."

The young man gave way, as he usually did when Elizabeth took an obstinate fit into her head, and after bidding the Prior good-night, the lovers took their departure.

* * * * *

The Priory clock was slowly tolling forth the hour of midnight, as the Lord Bishop of Wartenheim entered the church to keep his vigil. Within the sacred building all was still as death, the only sound that occasionally smote upon the ear was the fluttering of a bat high up in the darkness of the roof; through the great east window the moonlight was streaming across the chancel, illuminating the figures on the rood with a weird, unearthly glow, playing at hide and seek among the pillars, leaving here a streak of silvery whiteness, and there a patch of inky blackness; flooding with soft light the chapel of St. Boniface, and resting with a halo above the shrine of the holy relic.

It was here that the Bishop bent his footsteps, heedless of the solemn grandeur around him, thinking only of the prize so well within his grasp. He reached the chapel, and knelt, from force of habit. The shrine was a rare masterpiece of the sculptor's art, rich in carvings of quaint design, and encrusted with jewels, the gifts of many a devout pilgrim. It represented a life-sized recumbent figure of St. Boniface, round whose neck was suspended a cross of diamonds, sapphires and rubies, containing one of the teeth of the Saint.

From the marble sarcophagus upon which the holy Boniface reposed, arose six carved pillars, supporting the watching-chamber, which was composed of oaken trellis work. It was usually occupied by a monk, but at the present moment was left vacant.

The prelate remained in prayer for some moments, then raised his head and

gazed upon the relic. The diamonds glittering in the rays of the moon, seemed to bid him seize them, and, putting forth his hand, he was about to remove the cross from the breast of the saint, when something icy cold and heavy as lead closed upon his wrist, crushing it as in a vice.

With a cry of terror the Bishop en-

deavoured to struggle to his feet, but was forced to his knees again, held down by the marble hand of the outraged Boniface, who, recalled to life by the impending sacrilege, protected thus the holy relic in his own person.

As the hideous truth dawned upon him, and he saw the once insensible effigy rising to curse him, the Bishop,



And the worthy Prior fell into such throes of silent laughter that the tears fairly rolled down his cheeks.

with an appalling scream, fell prostrate on the floor in a dead faint.

When he again recovered consciousness, he became aware that someone was holding up his head, and on opening his eyes, perceived Wolfgang kneeling beside him.

"Ah! don't leave me, don't leave me!" he cried with a nervous clutch, gazing fearfully at the recumbent saint, who had resumed his normal attitude. "I—I have had a terrible shock!"

"Yes, my Lord Bishop, I entered the church just in time to see thee fall," answered the young knight gravely.

"Then—then thou didst see—that?" and the trembling bishop pointed with a shudder to the shrine.

"Aye, my lord, I witnessed both the intended theft and its strange prevention."

"But, good Wolfgang, thou wilt say naught about it—I will reward thee if thou wilt keep silence."

"I will do so upon one condition only," replied the Count Von Hartstein, as he assisted the prelate to his feet. "Thou **must** obtain the Burgomaster's consent to my marriage with his granddaughter Elizabeth, and thou **must** pay me a goodly sum by way of a wedding portion."

"Anything! anything!" groaned the bishop, tottering from the church.

"But, remember," cried Wolfgang, "an thou fail in thy promise, thy sacrilege and its punishment shall be made known throughout the Fatherland!"

"Nay, rest assured, my son, I shall keep my word; I swear it to thee," replied the bishop as he reached the open air.

Wolfgang accompanied him to the

monks' quarters, and then returned to the church.

He found the Prior seated on the edge of the shrine, divesting himself of the white garment that had done duty as the saint's robe. Below it he wore a complete suit of mail, which had effectually concealed his breathing, and had given both the appearance and feel of marble, the likeness to the effigy being further heightened by the whitening of his face and gauntleted hands with a preparation of chalk.

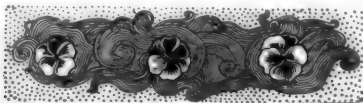
"Heaven bless thee, my son," he said as Wolfgang approached, "thy plan has succeeded beyond all hope, and great shall be thy reward. Ho! in faith 'twas a grand moment when the thieving bishop found himself as he believed in the grip of the angry saint!"

And the worthy Prior, shaking his head from side to side, fell into such throes of silent laughter, that the tears fairly rolled down his cheeks.

"And now, my son," he said at length, as he rose and wiped his eyes, "I pray thee help me out of this armour which thou hast so kindly lent me, and then I shall pass the rest of the night in vigil before the relic, as a thank-offering for our happy deliverance from a terrible sacrilege."

* * * *

The Bishop of Wartenheim kept his promise made by the shrine of St. Boniface, and when a month later the marriage of Count Wolfgang Von Hartstein with the Baroness Elizabeth Von Neu-deck was celebrated in the Priory church, it was no "penniless, adventuring" knight that led the heiress to the altar, but one whose fortune was well able to vie with her own.





I WAS alone, at last. Alone, if I except the presence of the corpse lying on the bed there, the corpse that had once been me. It seemed very lonely after the assiduous attentions of the past few days; very dreary indeed, without the correct and incessant tending of my wife, who had hovered about me, seeking to minister to my every want, while the gross thing over yonder had sought to retain me within itself with such prodigious energy that I marvelled as to its source.

I found myself wishing even that Sir John Gore might enter with his professional pomposity and break the monotony of the room. I chuckled when I thought how he had been cheated. It was but an hour ago that he had penned a prescription, a variant of many that had preceded it, and given to afford the impression of energy aroused on behalf of his illustrious patient. His last words were that nothing need be feared, that the dose would induce a pleasant somnolence, that in the morning I should be convalescent, that in a week I should

be well and ready to preside at the forthcoming soiree of the Royal Society.

I think I could even have welcomed my wife's lap dog, which had snarled itself out of the room, when I had come in contact with it after wresting myself free from the partner of my mundane life. I felt so intolerably isolated; the sense of desertion irritated me.

I expected myself to do something. I did not know what. I knew I no longer appertained to the room where my body lay. Since my death I had felt attracted to it as by the force of gravity. Now, I was impelled to move on. I passed through the door, and not knowing where to go I descended the stairs.

I paused on a landing, waiting for the initiative which in life had been supplied by my body. But no suggestion came. Then I entered a room. Three women were there. My wife, my daughter, and another woman.

My wife was sobbing. Presently she said to the other woman, the strange one, "You can make the skirt with a box



Then I entered a room. Three women were there.

pleat, and finish it with a shaped flounce of crêpe."

The woman replied, "It will look very handsome, your ladyship."

I hurriedly left and wandered about the staircases and the landings and the vestibule, avoiding everyone, now and again urged by that old indefinable force to revisit the frigid body that had been mine.

It distressed me that I had lost all sense of time. By-and-bye, I met some men labouring down the stairs; on their shoulders they bore my body encased in

a coffin. I followed them closely as they placed it in a hearse and drove off, ultimately reaching a cemetery. Many people were assembled. The coffin was reverently lowered into the hole that had been prepared for it. The earth was cast in, the collect uttered, and the priest said a few impressive words concerning my many virtues and public services. Then all those who had been present hurried away discussing various matters.

Left to myself, I remained where I had been, within the rails of a neighbouring tomb, to think and await eventualities.

A fragment of glass lying on a grave arrested my attention. It was prism-shaped, and the sunlight passing through it cast gaudy-coloured streaks on the stone. I noticed that the bands were not identical with those of solar light. There were additional lines, evidently due to the fact that I was acting as a screen to the sun's rays and absorbing them. I was astonished at the wonderful definition and vividness of the spectrum

as I saw. The shifting lines forced on me the knowledge that my own constitution was changing. I had, it could be deduced from my varying spectrum, originally consisted of oxygen, nitrogen, hydrogen, and carbon, but the grosser elements—those most relatively subject to the pull of gravity—were gradually leaving me, and now there were indications of little but the gas, methane. I had further evidence of these deductions in my decreasing weight, which impelled me to leave the ground, and gradually ascend until I had pierced the attenuated outer

edge of air, and found myself expanding in the rarer atmosphere beyond.

course in some intelligent fashion. What I took to be a planet attracted my



On their shoulders they bore my body encased in a coffin.

It occurred to me that I ought to think in order to shape my future attention, but my first effort to divert my path in its direction convinced me

that I was subject to some other power than my own. Reflection showed me that some force corresponding to terrestrial gravity, but sympathetic to the lighter gases, had me in its toils, and was drawing me, I knew not whither.

My surroundings gradually grew more and more heated, my own bulk continued to extend, and in a short while I entered a zone of incandescent gases. It was marvellous they did not absorb me. And now there were forked flames, their bases arising from what in the place whence I had come would have been styled *terra firma*, but which was here molten matter, probably liquefied metals. Nevertheless, it served the purpose of a resting place for myself and thousands of others like myself, who were travelling in all directions.

I recognised many of the forms, notwithstanding their gaseous condition, as appertaining to persons I had known on earth. I moved on as I saw those others doing, and wandered for unknown time and over unknown space. I spoke to some I met, if the buccal signs by which language is expressed in a sphere where there are no sound vibrations can be described as speech; for we merely moved our mouths in ghostly but significant manner, such, in fact, as is the accompaniment of speech in live men.

I came across Lord Blazacre, the Tory Premier, who had died some months before my own demise.

He enquired if the people were still held together by the British Empire.

I answered him that the Empire was now held together by the people.

My companion directed me to where I could find a set of men who, like myself, had devoted their lives to scientific pursuits. But the landmarks he mentioned were not of the nature to prove useful to me, as I had not yet mastered their peculiarities, and it seemed an age of misery ere I happened on those I sought. They were a group of gaseous phantoms, horribly distended by the intense heat, as was I myself, and suffering an indefinable misery, their incapacity to give any permanence to the ideas they evolved adding to the torment.

Among them I discovered my old friend Sir Theophilus Wrightson, who had preceded me in the presidency of the Royal Society. Strangely enough, he accepted my advent as a matter of course, and introduced me to Sir Arthur Magnet, the famous engineer, and Mr. Winfield, who had likewise in his day presided over the destinies of the Society. Indeed, this particular quarter of the strange world in which I found myself appeared to be inhabited by a coterie of Royal-Society Presidents and their friends. It was pleasant enough company, although tedious withal, owing to the impossibility of following any pursuit.

At least, however, we were able to discuss subjects of interest; and Sir Theophilus informed me that others who had made a practice of traversing the place on which we rested, had discovered that it was not invariably a land of flame. There were parts where a hard if arid crust had formed.

"Would it not be possible," I asked, "for us to find this spot?" I felt that anything would be preferable to our present condition.

Sir Theophilus and the others agreed to this, and we set forth, a large party. In the course of our peregrinations, I determined that we were on a sphere whose gaseous core was enveloped in more or less molten matter, from which, in one hemisphere only, sprang vast flames, such as I had at first encountered. Elsewhere, there was a great tendency for this molten mass, as I had been told, to form a crust.

We pushed on, and ultimately found ourselves on a vast tract of this formation.

The heat was now somewhat less intense than it had been, and our figures shrank to more human dimensions. I suggested that here would be an opportunity for practical scientific work. And for long we debated ways and means.

Meanwhile, some of our party, who, with what I may term the condensation of their forms, had acquired considerable strength of unknown source, engaged



"There would be no death so long as we maintained our atmospheric conditions."

themselves with turning over the various strata of our planet's covering. They found immense deposits of iron. Then a brilliant idea occurred to me.

"Why," I demanded of my companions, "should we not attempt to convert the prodigious heat with which we are surrounded, into some other form of energy that would be more serviceable to us?"

"Why, in short," I argued, "should we not, with such vast resources, establish a gigantic cold chamber as a home?"

The idea was received with approval.

"Who knows," I continued, "but what in such a paradise we might not ultimately so evolve as to again realise a culture and a civilisation resembling that to which we have all been accustomed!"

Sir Theophilus was evidently smitten with the idea. I saw him tremble with excitement, as he added, "Aye, and we should be the arbiters of our own fates. There would be no death so long as we maintained our atmospheric conditions."

Others conveyed their expressions of approval equally enthusiastically; others vaguely hinted at similar efforts that had been made in the past, and with dire consequences.

Machines and tools were constructed with an energy that would have done credit to beings of considerable muscular power.

As we proceeded, thousands, and then millions, of our fellows gathered to the work, and the labour of organisation devolved on me.

Powerful pumps began to erect their heads. The attenuated air had to be compressed and compelled to part with some of its heat; a medium had to be found to carry off that heat. This done, the air was allowed to expand, and we had intense cold, which was gradually communicated to the huge chamber we had constructed.

Eureka! We had succeeded. But how could we have failed to succeed with the united scientific knowledge of countless generations to guide us?

Our new home was ready for occupation by myriads, and they flocked in, a never-ending throng, although we excluded all save the workers.

Each had now, thanks to the frigid environment, assumed a more human shape, and many human devices were adopted to add pleasure to the monotony of our lives, which was soon to be strangely relieved.

Although we had little cognisance of the neighbouring planets, the inhabitants of one of these were quite *au fait* with our doings. They, too, had once dwelt on earth, but their lot was now a far pleasanter one than ours. In place of the fiery crucible in which we were cast, they had, we were shortly to learn, a habitation of singular beauty, equable in temperature and luxurious in the extreme. They devoted their time there to the voicing of pæans of praise and floating in the sunny atmosphere.

Their curiosity had been aroused by the marvels of our work; moreover, the perpetual summer-tide of their own realm chafed them by its dreary sameness; for, at first by twos and threes, then by tens and hundreds and thousands, they came floating into our home, for the most part to take up their abode. We welcomed the tinge of novelty they threw over all, with their gentle, womanly ways, for just as we were mostly men, so these new-comers from the other sphere were mostly fair women. They also appreciated community with us, many pairing with those of our planet—now and again meeting former mates—just as they had been wont to do in the old world.

It was paradise! Our life was revolutionised, but, unfortunately, at the cost of our undertaking. The cold chamber, through neglect, began to show signs of dissolution. The temper of the metal that composed our pumps was sorely tried, and now and again an ominous crack would cause us to remember the croakings of those who had prophesied vague disasters when our work was inaugurated.

Chaos came at last, the material of our home hotly streaming to join the molten flood that now well-nigh enveloped us. My gaseous body, suddenly plunged into this blasting heat, was released with great impetus from its condensed form. The expansion was so great and swift that I felt I was fated to be spread over the

whole universe of space. I lost all sense
of cosmic individuality.

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"You will observe," said Sir John
Gore, leaning over me and addressing my

wife, who presented a very distinguished
appearance in her white morning gown,
"the effects of the draught. I think in
a week he will be, as indeed I ventured
to prophesy, quite competent to preside
at the Royal Society."

REITERATION.

FROM out the long ago
There steals the beauty of a thought
A noble poet nobly wrought
Its every word I know,
And yet I read it o'er and o'er,
And every reading makes it more.

From out the dreamy past
A grand old air, a dear old strain,
Floats back to memory again,
And memory holds it fast,
And still I love its sound as much
As though not knowing every touch.

You love me. Yes, I know.
I know it well by life and death.
I know it by your latest breath
That whispered sweet and low.
Ah, me, the music of its vow!
O, sweetheart, say you love me now!

J. EDMUND V. COOKE.

